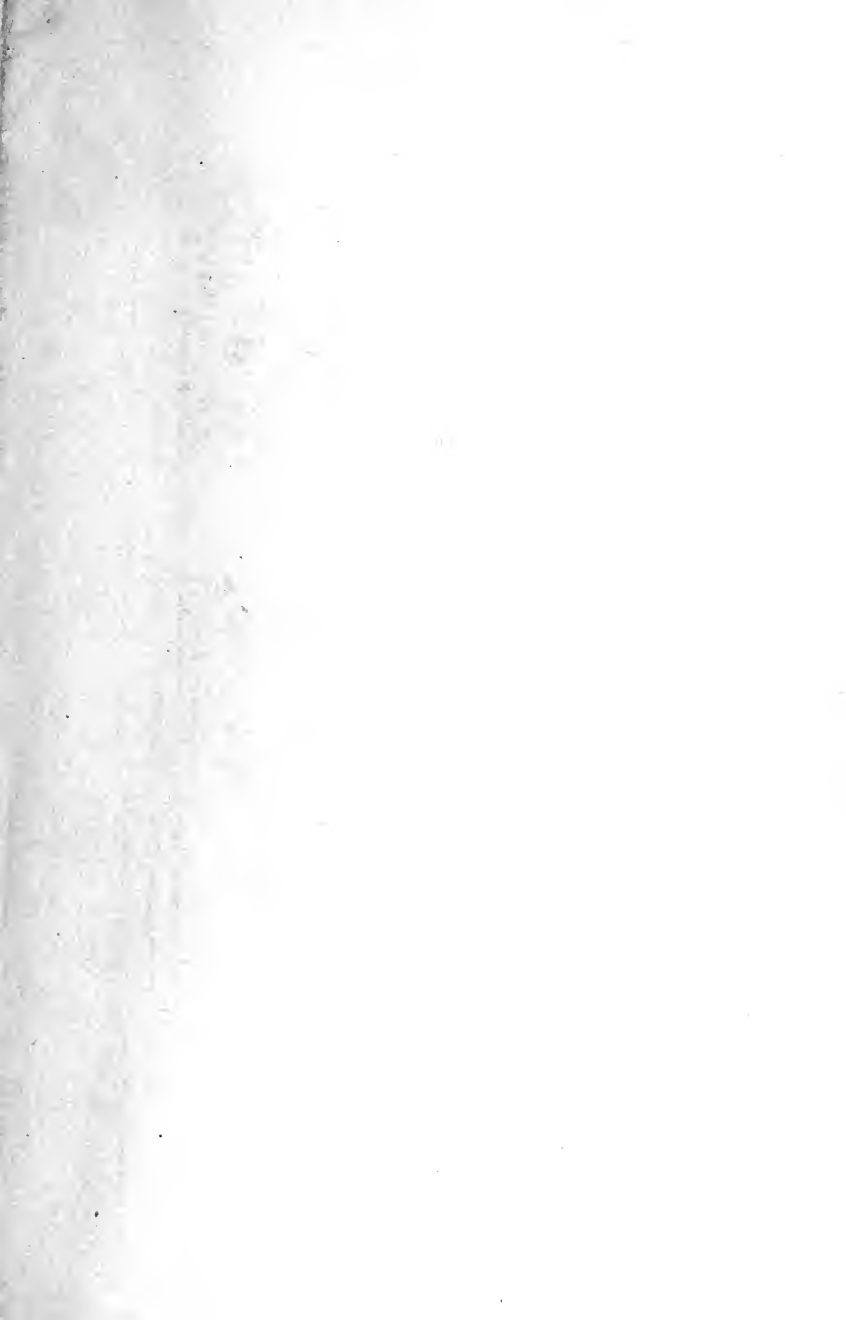


Is Death the End ?

John Haynes Holmes









Is Death the End?

Being a Statement of the Arguments for Immortality; a Justification, from the Standpoint of Modern Scientific and Philosophic Thought, of the Immortal Hope; and a Consideration of the Conditions of Immortality and Their Relation to the Facts and Problems of Present Human Existence

By

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To

THE RADIANT MEMORY OF

ROBERT COLLYER

MY HONOURED COLLEAGUE, BENIGNANT FRIEND, BELOVED FATHER
IN THE SPIRIT

"While I must say with the great apostle, 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be,' I hold as well to the faith that . . . I shall pass out of one room in the many mansions into another, and what treasure in the heavens was mine here, will be mine there, while that which is to come will not seem so much another life as the ripeness and perfecting of this life that now is."—

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PREFACE

IN an age when religion has become intensely practical, and interest in the certainties of this present life has superseded interest in the probabilities or possibilities of the life to come, it is perhaps necessary to justify this treatise upon the question, Is death the end? My reasons for writing it are definite and I trust not wholly anachronistic.

I

First of all, I must make the personal confession that, from my earliest years, I have been interested in philosophical and theological speculations of every kind. Furthermore, I have ever found the most fascinating of all such speculations that pertaining to the idea of survival after death. For years I have studied and meditated upon this problem, and at last I have come to the point where I desire to express my thoughts and convictions. Hence this book!

Secondly, I must make another confession to the effect that I feel within myself an intense desire to

live beyond the temporal bounds of present existence. So far as I can determine, this desire has its origin in no ignoble pride in my own personality, for I am conscious of no mean ambition to have that personality as such perpetuated. It comes from no instinctive reaction from a fear of the end, for I think I could receive a proof of extinction with equanimity, although with disappointment. It certainly springs from no yearning for the resumption of personal relations which have been interrupted by death, for no one of those nearest and dearest to me, either friend or kinsman, has yet passed into the unknown. I want to live on and on, simply because I am sure that within a narrow span of seventy or eighty years I never can learn all I want to learn, do all I want to do, or love all I want to love. I want to survive after death, for practically the same reason that I want to awake tomorrow morning after tonight's slumber. This life, like this day, is too short for the fulfilment of my purposes. I want to live on, because I want to work on, forever!

Such is my desire. But what chance is there that this desire will be realized? Here is, for me at least, a very practical question. And it is the endeavour to answer this question which in part explains this book.

The book, however, is intended more for others than for myself—else while it might have been written, it would never have sought a publisher. That there is wide-spread indifference today to this

whole problem of immortality, is, as Dr. William Osler has convincingly testified, a matter of common observation.¹ Perhaps never before, in the history of human thought, has indifference been so general. And yet I doubt if it is quite so universally characteristic of the modern mind as we are sometimes led to believe. Dr. Osler bases his testimony on his experience at the bedsides of the dying. I could match this by testimony to the contrary based on my experience at the gravesides of the dead. If the individual is indifferent, at the moment of his own passing, he is certainly not indifferent at the moment of the passing of another whom he passionately loves. Nor does interest in immortality spring wholly from the natural desire to "meet again." I have found plenty of indifference; but again and again I have found that this indifference is only skin-deep, so to speak. It is all mixed up with certain theological presuppositions about heaven and hell, golden gates and brimstone lakes. Indifferent to these childish imaginings, people think themselves indifferent to the whole problem. But when I have pressed them upon the question, and have described to them the immortal life in terms simply of continued activity rather than of quiescent fulfilment or final judgment, I have again and again found them quite as eager to live on as I am. We all want to live—nature's instinct of self-preservation is only a physical reflection of a deep-rooted

¹ See *Science and Immortality*, pages 9-20.

spiritual impulse—and this means the desire for immortality!

To confirm this desire in others as well as in myself, and to transform it in their hearts, as in my own, from a vague yearning or hope into a sure conviction, has in large part been my purpose in the writing of this book.

Finally, beyond all the facts of individual hope and fear, is the fact of society and its destiny. This is the age of the social question, and therefore predominantly the age of thought and action for the life that is here and now. Strange as it may seem, it is just because of my supreme interest in the social movements of our time, and the stupendous emancipations of the bodies and souls of men that are involved in these movements, that I feel a fervent interest in the apparently remote problem of life after death. To regard this problem as remote, however, is the very essence of superficial thought and shallow feeling. Nothing in reality could be nearer; for not till we come to believe profoundly that every human being is at bottom an immortal soul can we see the social question of our day in its true aspect, and give to it its true direction. The one greatest public need of the present moment is the redemption of the modern movement of social revolution from the materialism which haunts it as camp-followers haunt an army. And this can be achieved only through the establishment of the idea that death is not the end of life.

II

The argument of the book is simple and plainly indicated in the chapter-headings.

Defining immortality as the survival of individuality (Introduction), I have first of all made it plain, as the basis of all further argument, that the question is one which is wide-open for discussion (Chapter II)—that, in spite of the assertion of scientific materialism to the contrary, there is no presumption against the immortal hope—that, in the lack of all positive evidential knowledge, there is no more reason why we should believe in mortality than in immortality. The challenge for a proof of extinction is a fair retort to the challenge for a proof of survival.

With this all-important point made clear, I have at once proceeded to consider what can be said in favour of the postulate of eternal life. After thorough consideration of the classic arguments for immortality (Chapter III), which find their common starting-point in the essential nature of man, I have shown the great change which was wrought, in this field of thought as in every other, by the doctrine of evolution, and the favourable bearing of this doctrine upon our problem (Chapter IV). The demand not merely for favourable arguments but for positive proof, which is characteristic of the scientific temper of our age, brought me to a study of the remarkable work of the Society for Psychical Research (Chapter V). This I found

significant but inconclusive. Proof of our hope, however, need not for this reason be abandoned. On the contrary, that very method of proof which is everywhere used today for the substantiation of the deepest and highest speculations of natural science, is fully applicable here, and demonstrates immortality on the same basis that the mightiest truths of physics and chemistry are now demonstrated. This decisive point I have expounded under the well-considered title of "The Proof of Immortality" (Chapter VI).

But, granted that immortality is a reality, is it a reality for all men or only for a selected few? This question which is as old as the oldest speculations of a heaven-and-hell theology, and as new as the newest challenge of revolutionary socialism, I have considered at length under the modern title of "Conditional Immortality" (Chapter VII), and answered with all possible emphasis in terms of universalism. The analogous question of the character of the immortal life I have tried to answer (Chapter VIII) in something other than the rather absurd traditional way. The modern scientific method has a very direct bearing upon this speculation which I have ventured to utilize.

Discussions of the two questions, "Is Immortality Desirable?" (Chapter IX), and "Mortal or Immortal: Does It Make Any Practical Difference?" (Chapter X), in which I trust I have made the practical aspects of my theme manifest, bring me to the "Conclusion" (Chapter XI), in

which I have shown the relation of this whole question of immortality to a spiritual interpretation of the universe. The final and perfect justification of our hope, after all, must rest upon our belief in God and the soul. If these are true—and who will assert that they are not?—then it is surely something more than probable that death is not the end.

III

My references to contemporary writings are numerous, and are duly noted in the text. I have deliberately made quotations as many and as full as possible, in order that my readers may be acquainted not merely with my own thought, but with the tendency of modern sentiment.

In conclusion, I would make acknowledgment of the indispensable services of my secretary, Miss Mary C. Baker. Without her indefatigable assistance, this book would never have been completed.

J. H. H.

CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH,
NEW YORK CITY, November 1, 1914.



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“ We do not believe immortality because we have proved it, but we forever try to prove it because we believe it.”—JAMES MARTINEAU.

Is Death the End?

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“‘In what way shall we bury you?’ said Crito.

“‘However you may wish,’ replied Socrates, ‘only you must catch me first and see that I don’t slip away.’ And then smiling quietly and turning to us, he said,

“‘Why, my friends, I can’t convince Crito that I am this Socrates, the one who talks with you and argues at length. He thinks that I am that other whom presently he shall see lying dead, and so he asks how he shall bury me. All the words I have spoken to show that when I drink the poison I shall no longer remain with you, but shall go away to some blessed region of the happy dead,—all my words of comfort for you and for myself are thrown away on him. . . . Dear Crito, bear the matter more lightly. Be not troubled at my supposed sufferings when you see my body burned or interred, nor say at the funeral that you are laying out Socrates, or carrying Socrates to the grave, or burying him. . . . Be brave, and say you are burying my body. And you may bury it as seems to you good and as custom directs.’”—Socrates, in Plato’s *Phædo*. See *Dialogues*, trans. by Jowett, vol. ii., page 263.

I

IN asking the great question, Is death the end?
I understand that I am entering upon the very specific inquiry as to whether death is the end of

ourselves as separate and distinct individualities. In discussing immortality, I assume that I am discussing the survival of the human soul, after the dissolution of the body, in the full retention of its conscious identity. I open this discussion with exactly the same interpretation of the essential problem involved that Professor Josiah Royce lays down, in his *The Conception of Immortality*.

When we ask [he says], about the immortality of man, it is the permanence of the individual man concerning which we mean to inquire, and not primarily the permanence of the human type as such, nor the permanence of any other system of laws or relationships.

In our case, as in his, we may say "so far . . . we are all agreed!"¹

II

It is well to make this interpretation of our subject perfectly plain at the outset, in order that there may be no confusion as to the meaning of our terms and the purpose of our argument. In the old days this identification of immortality with the survival of individuality would have been taken for granted. The thought of "our eternity" as implying survival without any sort of consciousness, or absorption into some kind of so-called cosmic consciousness, would have been regarded as preposterous. To

¹ See *Conception of Immortality*, page 2.

be conscious after death exactly as before death, to recall the past and to be able to connect it with the present, to know oneself as oneself and thus as different from other selves, this, and nothing less than this, it is to be immortal! Dr. John Fiske reflects the traditional idea with perfect accuracy when he finds the essence of immortality in the permanence of that personal love which is here at once the source and end of life. "We are all agreed," he says, "that life beyond the grave would be a delusion and a cruel mockery without the continuance of the tender household affections which alone make the present life worth living."¹

Within recent years, however, this general agreement has been broken. Indeed it is not too much to say that there has been a concerted endeavour, in certain philosophical quarters, to reinterpret the conception of immortal life in terms of something less than individual survival. At the bottom of this action, of course, is the worthy motive of trying to save some remnant of the eternal hope from that complete annihilation which seemed to be threatened by the results of modern biological and psychological research. Recognizing the very real difficulties in the way of personal immortality, reluctant to go with the materialists to what seemed to be the logical conclusion of a denial of the whole conception of survival, hopeful that it might be possible to retain a rational belief in the permanence of "the type," of which nature seemed

¹ See *Life Everlasting*, page 57.

“so careful,” if not of “the single life,” certain thinkers have entered upon a deliberate attempt to empty the doctrine of immortality of all of its personal content. Maurice Maeterlinck’s recent book, entitled *Our Eternity*, is the latest illustration of this conspicuous tendency of contemporary thought. Seeing clearly on the one hand that “survival without any sort of consciousness would be tantamount for us to annihilation pure and simple,” which in turn he regards as “impossible” —convinced on the other hand that “survival with our present consciousness is nearly as impossible and as incomprehensible as total annihilation,” and certain that, even if it were possible, it would still be highly undesirable, since it would involve the perpetuation of all those limitations of the present life from which any future life must furnish release—Maeterlinck turns confidently to the discussion of “infinities,” and finds his refuge at last in some kind of “modified consciousness” as he calls it, which is but feebly distinguished from the larger, all-inclusive “cosmic consciousness” into which it seems doomed ultimately to merge. “Behold us before the mystery of that cosmic consciousness,” he says, in conclusion of his argument. “If this consciousness exist, . . . it is evident that we shall be there and take part in it. If there be a consciousness somewhere, or some thing that takes the place of consciousness, we shall be in that consciousness or that thing, because we cannot be elsewhere.” And if there be

“no sort of consciousness, nor anything that stands for it, the reason will be that consciousness or anything that might replace it, is not indispensable to eternal happiness.”¹

III

To the person familiar with the traditional interpretation of immortality, and yearning for the survival not merely of himself but of those other dearly beloved selves whose existence with him in this world has alone made life worth while, such a nebulous conception of the future as this must seem utterly abhorrent. But it is interesting to note that, with the development of this desperate attempt to save the shell of the immortal hope at the expense of the kernel, as I would put it, there has come a state of mind which finds this kind of impersonal survival not only attractive, but infinitely grander and nobler than the old conception.

A most impressive illustration of this very modern² attitude has, strangely enough, just come to my desk in the shape of a handsome monograph, written and privately printed by an honoured friend, in eulogy of a remarkable collie dog, named Bob.³ At the close of his very touching

¹ See *Our Eternity*, pages 248, 40, 179, 189, 254.

² And yet very ancient, for its connection with much Eastern, especially Buddhist, thought is obvious!

³ *The Passing of Bob*, by J. E. Williams.

tribute to his canine friend, the author raises the question, which has ever bothered every true lover of dogs,

Does the soul of Bob persist? [and he answers the question, as every true lover of dogs has ever answered it, in the affirmative. His idea of persistence, however, is unique.] How do I know [he asks], that Bob is eternal? Because now that my eyes are opened I see the qualities that Bob has taught me to love in him in every dog I meet. . . . A brown collie, with pointed nose and speaking eyes, calls up the same glad thrill within me, and I catch myself crying out "Bob!" almost before I am aware of it. The same abounding joy is there, the same wistful pathos, the same adoring affection, all the qualities that were concentrated and raised to the *n*th degree in Bob are incarnated in varying measure in every dog that frisks by me on the street. And I know that this is the essence, the soul, the eternal reality of Bob, and that the protoplasmic cells which had their aggregation and limitation in time were only the temporary vehicle, the passing channel, of a spirit which will flow on through other Bobs as long as the species shall last, and then sweep on down the stream of time animating other modes of motion, other forms of being, through an eternity.

Then he passes on to the startling question,

Is not this immortality enough? Do we still cling to our little egos? Still hug the limitations which fence us off from others? Still refuse to identify ourselves with the great soul which is the ocean of

which we are a drop? Alas! the price of our intellectualism, our individuality. Why will we not see that the precious thing is not eternal separateness but eternal continuity? Why not realize that what we in our heart of hearts want is that essences shall be conserved—not accidents; souls—not egos; humanities—not individualities?¹

And this leads directly to a statement of our author's underlying philosophy of life.

In my limited ego [he says], I am only the gathering point, the "coherer" of vibrations that started back in the abysmal deeps of time, which have agitated unnumbered centres of life before they reached me, and will vibrate again through countless ages until resolved into some inconceivable unity of being, some waveless immobility of existence, in which, in some unimaginable fashion, all vibrations shall be merged. . . . I am one with the spirit that fills eternity. I have lived in many bodies, and shall live again in an endless series until Time itself shall cease to be.

IV

The sublimity of such a faith as this, both in thought and feeling, is plain. But it requires only a moment's consideration to discover that, whatever else it may be, it is not a faith in immortality! An analysis of the question, Is death the end? reveals four possible solutions of the problem. In the first place, death may be followed by total

¹ See the exactly similar statement of Mr. H. G. Wells in his *First and Last Things*, page 189.

annihilation. Secondly, one may survive, but without any consciousness whatsoever. Thirdly, one may survive with just the same consciousness of personal identity which we have today. Lastly, one may survive by being merged with, or absorbed into, the universal consciousness, whatever that may be supposed to be.

Of these four conceivable solutions, only the third involves what is rightly meant by immortality! The first it is the purpose of this book to demonstrate is impossible. The second, while it retains in form at least the idea of survival, is really equivalent, as Maeterlinck points out, to annihilation. "The hypothesis is unquestionably more acceptable than that of annihilation" . . . but it is at best nothing more than "a sleep with no dreams and no awakening."—But why is not the last possibility equivalent to annihilation also? Wherein is there any difference between losing one's consciousness in "sleep" or losing it in a larger consciousness wherein it is swallowed up like a wave falling back into the sea from which it rose? The Eastern mystics, with their doctrine of Nirvana, certainly have no illusion upon this point. They hail absorption into the Whole as the goal of existence, and the way to this goal they call the Way of Salvation. But this end is welcomed, and its attainment described as salvation, not because a larger, higher, truer life is gained, but because life itself, which they describe as in

¹ See *Our Eternity*, page 248.

essence misery, is thereby ended once for all. Hence the conclusion of the best scholars that the doctrine of Nirvana is a doctrine not of immortality at all, but of annihilation or extinction!

Only the third solution, as I have said, can rightly be termed a theory of immortal life! These others, especially the last, may have in them much of rest, comfort, inspiration. They may, in the last analysis, prove to be "more to be desired" than persistence with our present consciousness intact. They may involve a sublimity of sacrifice which is remote from the conception of personal survival. If so, so be it! But let us not juggle with words or deceive with phrases. For the sake of clear thinking and honest speaking, let us not use language which has a very fixed and definite meaning, to describe new or alien ideas! Let our "conversation be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay!" Immortality means one thing—that I as I, and you as you—I knowing that I am I and not you, and you knowing that you are you and not I—shall continue to live on after death, in this intensely personal way, just as we are living at this present moment! It may be that we cannot believe that the survival of the individual in this way is possible. It may be that we cannot believe that such survival, if possible, is desirable. But if such be our thought, let us be honest, and say so. Let us declare that we do not believe in immortality. Let us admit that death is the end—of *us*! If we similarly cannot believe in the extreme alterna-

tive of absolute annihilation and take refuge in some doctrine of "a modified consciousness" or other, let us again be honest, and say so in words that hide no equivocation of meaning. Let us call this condition survival, persistence, Nirvana! Anything but immortality! These ideas, and others like them, may pertain to eternity, strictly speaking; but, Maurice Maeterlinck to the contrary notwithstanding, they do not pertain to "*our* eternity."

v

To define immortality in this restricted sense, is not to assume that there are no real difficulties in the way of a belief in the survival of the individual as such. If such were the case, the writing of this book could and should be stopped at this early point in the discussion. How can personal identity be preserved apart from the body; what is there in our "stream of consciousness" that is stable enough to survive; is not the sense of personal identity dependent upon memory, and is not memory one of the most uncertain faculties of the mind; how can we expect our consciousness of self to survive the terrific cataclysm of death, when it can be destroyed by a slight accident to the brain or a mere disorganization of the nerves; what is there in this life which is really worth carrying over into the next life; will not the survival of the memory of our sins and sorrows here

destroy the beauty that immortality might otherwise give, and make "a sleep and a forgetting," or an absorption in the All, or even annihilation, a boon in comparison; if we expect to be conscious of this life in the life to come, why are we not now conscious of the life that must have preceded this, if we are really eternal beings? These are only a few of the questions raised by the thought of immortality, interpreted as personal survival, which stand as difficulties in the way of full belief. Nor has anybody yet discovered, so far as I know, how these questions are to be answered, and the difficulties involved therefore removed. In the last analysis, I presume, the postulate of immortality must be described as utterly inconceivable; although we must remember, when we make this confession, that this fact does not militate in the slightest degree against its possible, or even probable, reality. That which is, by the very nature of its reality, beyond the bounds of experience, must be inconceivable, and therefore cannot be denied because of its inconceivability.

How much does this argument (of inconceivability) amount to [asks John Fiske, in his *Life Everlasting*], as against the belief that the soul survives the body? The answer is, Nothing! absolutely nothing. It not only fails to disprove the validity of the belief, but does not raise even the slightest *prima facie* presumption against it.¹

¹ See *Life Everlasting*, pages 61-62.

An opinion which another scholar confirms with the words, "the entire absence of testimony does not even raise a negative presumption except in cases when testimony is accessible!"¹

The difficulties are there, unquestionably! But what about the difficulties that are raised on the other hand by the denial of immortality, and the obstacles thereby put in the way of a belief in our personal extinction or absorption? Take as the initial difficulty, for example, the argument of such a book as Royce's *The Conception of Immortality*, wherein it is laid down that existence *per se* implies individuality—that not to be an individual "different from the rest of the world . . . an essential unique being,"² is not to exist at all—and that the

¹ *Life Everlasting*, page 64.

² See *The Conception of Immortality*, pages 7-8. Whoever is troubled by this problem of the survival of the individual as an individual should study Royce's little book, referred to in the text, with the greatest care, and then pass on to a further study of his larger work, *The World and the Individual, First Series*. This is difficult reading, but rewarding even to those who cannot accept Professor Royce's Idealism. "Individuality, which we are now loyally meaning to express, gets . . . its final and conscious expression in a life that . . . is conscious, and that in its meaning . . . is continuous with the fragmentary and flickering existence wherein we now see through a glass darkly our relations to God and to the final truth. I know not in the least . . . by what processes this individuality of our human life is further expressed . . . I know only that our various meanings . . . consciously come to what we individually, and God in whom alone we are individuals, shall together regard as the attainment of our unique place, and of our true relationships both to other individuals and the all-inclusive Individual, God himself. Further into the occult it is not the business of philo-

imperfection of the individual in this world and his inherent promise of larger fulfilment in the future is the one sure guarantee of survival. Here, in other words, is presented a rigorous dilemma between absolute extinction and individual immortality, with a denial of the possibility of any other kind of alternative. And added to this stupendous problem of the nature of individuality, which confronts every doubter of personal survival at the very start, there are the thousand and one overwhelming questions which it shall be the business of this book to elucidate, as its argument moves from one page to another of its progress. To be persuaded, or rather dissuaded, by the difficulties that stand in the way of belief, without also surveying the difficulties that stand in the way of disbelief, is dangerous business. Certainly the difficulties on this side are just as numerous, to say no more, as they are on the other side. It is true that it is hard to believe that we are immortal. But it is also true that it is hard to believe that we are not immortal.

The fact of the matter is, we are here confronted by two absolute inconceivabilities.¹ The one can as little be understood, or even imagined, as the

sophy to go. My nearest friends are already, as we have seen, occult enough for me. I wait until this mortal shall put on—Individuality." See pages 79–80.

¹ See Mr. Williams's confession above, page 7 ". . . until resolved into some *inconceivable* unity of being, some waveless immobility of existence in which, *in some unimaginable fashion*, all vibrations shall be merged."

other. In both cases there is an absence of certain experimental knowledge; and in this, as in similar dilemmas, we have no other course open to us, as reasonable beings, but to follow the line of belief which offers the least resistance of irrationality. Take the doctrine of evolution, for example! In the beginning Darwin's theory of the origin and development of species seemed utterly inconceivable. Today in spite of a half-century of exhaustive research by the greatest scientific minds of modern times, with its marvellous results of accumulated data and confirmed hypotheses, there still remain unanswered questions and unsurmounted, if not unsurmountable, difficulties. Nevertheless the speculation set forth in *The Origin of Species* is accepted by all leading scientists today, in spite of unanswered questions and unsurmounted difficulties, because the only alternative explanation of the facts of life offers questions and difficulties infinitely more serious in number and in character. To believe that species originated in the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence is hard enough. But what about trying to believe that species originate by the process of special creation? When required to choose between such alternatives, the scientific mind does not hesitate to accept the theory of evolution as true—at least until the burden of difficulty becomes shifted.

Now the problem of individual survival provides a parallel to this example of evolution. Here we are brought face to face with alternative

speculations. To accept either, to the exclusion of the other, is to find oneself beset by perplexities and problems. In both cases, one is driven to the acceptance of inconceivabilities. And yet choice must be made! That the difficulties in the way of a denial of immortality are infinitely greater than those in the way of an affirmation, and that the positive considerations for immortality far outweigh all that can be said for annihilation or impersonal survival of any kind, it is the purpose of this book to show. And that, in the end, I do not believe any lingering doubts upon the question can be left in the mind which has really thought the problem through, is shown by the fact that I venture, at the conclusion of my direct argument, to speak of "the proof of immortality!"¹

VI

One word more must be spoken before we proceed!

I have already pointed out that much of the thought of our time has been turned away from the conception of individual immortality to that of impersonal survival in a "modified or cosmic consciousness," by the feeling that the persistence of individuality must mean the persistence of the limitations which characterize this present life. Thus the author of *The Passing of Bob* speaks repeatedly of "our little egos," protests against

¹ See below, Chapter VI.

our inordinate desire to "hug the limitations that fence us off from others," and laments "our poor little strivings after separateness." Maeterlinck declares that our "ego implies limits," that "this sense of a special ego is probably an infirmity of our actual intelligence," and that in asking that it "should accompany us into the infinity of time," we are "acting like a sick man who, in order to recognize himself, . . . should think it necessary to continue his sickness in health and in the unending sequence of his days."¹ Hugo Münsterberg expresses much the same idea in his *The Eternal Life*. Speaking of a departed friend, he says,

I do not think that I should love him better if I hoped that he might be somewhere waiting through time and space to meet us again. Nothing could be added to his immortal value if some object like him were to enter the sphere of time again. I feel that I (should be taking) his existence in the space-time world as the real meaning of his life, and thus depriving his noble personality of every value and of every meaning.²

Individuality, in other words, implies all the restrictions of activity, outlook, vision, which characterize us as denizens of space and time, and if this individuality is to continue, it will inevitably rob the next life of all that makes continuance into the future worth while.

And then, too, aside from this feeling of the

¹ See *Our Eternity*, page 53.

² See *The Eternal Life*, pages 67-69.

individual as "cribbed, cabined, and confined," and thus incapable as an individual of spiritual survival, there is the further feeling of the essentially ignoble character of the desire for a personal immortality. Is anything more unworthy than the teachings of the church upon the subject of personal salvation? Look at the spectacle of the millions of men and women in all ages who, like Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*,¹ have tried to preserve their own wretched souls from destruction even though everybody else was predestined to annihilation. Is not sacrifice the note of the true life? Is not he the highest type of being who gladly dies that, by his death, another may survive? Will not such a being gladly forego all hope of immortality for his own poor self, if only he can be lost in that great Over-soul of Love in which he has been living all his days? Must not such an end, indeed, be certain if the self-sacrificing life is not to find itself deceived and mocked when it comes to its latter end?

Such considerations, if sound, would inevitably lead every right-minded man to an abandonment of the traditional idea of immortality. No one of us desires to be immortal at the expense of perpetuating the limitations and imperfections of

¹ "Now he had not run far from his own door when his wife and children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on, crying, 'Life! life! eternal life!'" *Pilgrim's Progress*, page 3. Was there ever a more striking example than this of how the necessities of a bad theology can befuddle the moral sentiments?

this present existence, and of surrendering our souls to the ignoble instincts of mere self-preservation. But are these considerations sound? On the contrary, are they not founded upon an inaccurate conception of the meaning of the individual life? Is real individuality hedged about by any such "separateness" as is here implied? Is the individual truest to himself as an individual when he seeks to save himself at the cost of any destruction to his fellows? Is not individuality most genuinely realized when the barriers of separation are overthrown, and the instinct of self-preservation lost in the mighty passion of sacrifice? When does an individual more fully realize the possibilities of individuality than when he surrenders his life, in love and adoration, to the perpetual service of another? When is a man more truly a man than when, in some moment of national crisis, he finds his life merged into that of his country, and gladly dies in her defence upon the field of battle? When are we more truly our best selves than when we are captivated by some cause for the betterment of humanity, or fall under the spell of some great leader of such a cause, and without a thought, "leave all and follow?" Individuality is not a matter of separateness or isolation, of petty desires or selfish fears. "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life, for my sake, shall find it." We are our best selves, our real selves, not when we are apart, seeking our own, forgetful of the world, but, on the contrary, when

we are with our fellows, serving mankind, losing ourselves in the all-encompassing unities of life. It is at such all-too-rare and glorious moments, strangely enough, that we are most intensely conscious of ourselves as individuals. The very loss seems to constitute that discovery of self which otherwise and elsewhere we have never made. Mr. H. G. Wells has touched upon this in a wonderful passage in a recent book. Speaking of the greater life of humanity which is yet to come, he says,

There come moments when the light shines out upon our thoughts. Sometimes in the dark, sleepless solitudes of night, one ceases to be so-and-so, one ceases to hear a proper name, forgets one's quarrels and vanities, forgives and understands one's enemies and oneself, as one forgives and understands the quarrels of little children, knowing oneself to be a greater than one's personal accidents, knowing oneself for Man on his planet, flying swiftly to unmeasured destinies through the starry stillness of space.¹

And James Russell Lowell voices the same paradox of "knowing oneself" through ceasing "to be so-and-so," in a famous passage in his *Cathedral*:

This life were brutish did we not sometimes
Have intimation clear of wider scope,
Hints of occasion infinite, to keep
The soul alert with noble discontent
And onward yearnings of unstilled desire;

¹ See *Social Forces in England and America*, page 514.

Fruitless, except we now and then divined
A mystery of Purpose, gleaming through
The secular confusions of the world,
Whose will we darkly accomplish, doing ours.
No man can think nor in himself perceive,
Sometimes at waking, in the street sometimes,
Or on the hillside, always unforewarned,
A grace of being, finer than himself,
That beckons and is gone,—a larger life
Upon his own impinging, with swift glimpse
Of spacious circles luminous with mind,
To which the ethereal substance of his own
Seems but gross cloud to make that visible,
Touched to a sudden glory round the edge.

It is on such Mounts of Transfiguration as these that we truly find ourselves—"put on individuality,"¹ as Royce expresses it! Hence need we have no fear that immortality, in the true personal sense, involves something either undesirable or unworthy. In these great moments of discovery of the Infinite, do we see all that true individuality really means; and at the same time the necessity that life shall continue forever, that these infinite reaches of personality may be at last attained.

¹ See *The Conception of Immortality*, page 80.

CHAPTER II

AN OPEN QUESTION

“With respect to immortality! As physical science states this problem, it seems to stand thus: Is there any means of knowing whether the series of states of consciousness, which has been casually associated for threescore years and ten with the arrangement and movement of innumerable millions of successively different material molecules, can be continued, in like association, with some substance which has not the properties of ‘matter and force’? As Kant said, on a like occasion, if anybody can answer that question, he is just the man I want to see. If he says that consciousness cannot exist except in relation of cause and effect with certain organic molecules, I must ask how he knows that; and, if he says it can, I must put the same question. And I am afraid that, like jesting Pilate, I shall not think it worth while (having but little time before me) to wait for an answer.”—Thomas H. Huxley, in *Fortnightly Review*, December, 1886.

I

ALMOST for the first time in the history of human thought, and absolutely for the first time in the history of Christian experience, the conception of immortality is today being brought into very open and serious question. There have always been doubters, to be sure, like the author

of *Job*, who have not hesitated to raise the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?"¹ There have always been deniers, like Omar Khayyam, who have pictured life as

One moment in Annihilation's Waste,
 One moment of the Well of Life to taste,
 The Stars are setting, and the Caravan
 Draws to the Dawn of Nothing—Oh make haste!

There have always been honest men who have confessed, as Socrates confessed at the hour of his death, that "God only knows" whether it is better "to die (or) to live."² But the majority of men have always believed, for one reason or another, in the immortality of the soul, and have apparently been willing to accept this doctrine without questioning even while rejecting every other theological or religious conception. This has been true of the men who have reasoned as well as of the men who have prayed—of the men who have investigated in their laboratories and taught in their university chairs, as well as of the men who have preached in their pulpits and stood in their confessionals. Leibnitz setting forth the doctrine of eternal life as one of the truths of natural religion—Kant classifying the idea of immortality with the ideas of God and of freedom as one of the three ideas the validity of which is attested by the practical, if not by the pure, reason

¹ See *Job* xiv : 14.

² See *Dialogues*, trans. by Jowett, vol. ii., page 135.

—Butler laying down this conception as the premise of all his argument in support of revealed religion—these men have been typical. In this instance, as in almost no other instance in the history of thought, men have agreed to believe in what they knew they could not know.

II

Today, however, the situation is different. No longer do we find this conception of immortality serenely accepted by the majority of mankind, and remaining practically unchallenged by those whose habit of mind it is to think. Dr. William Osler, the eminent physician of Oxford, gives it as his opinion, that "Practical indifference is the modern attitude of mind [on this question]; we are Laodiceans—neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm, as a very superficial observation will make plain."¹ It is difficult, he says, for example, to get people to discuss the problem at all, even when they give it as their conviction, when pressed upon the matter, that they believe in the immortality of the soul.

But this does not tell by any means the whole of the story. For even when we come to men and women who are intensely interested in the question of the immortal life and are giving much of their best thought to the solution of the problem—and there are many of these persons still!—we are

¹ See *Science and Immortality*, page 10.

likely, I believe as a matter of personal experience, to find people who have serious doubts about the truth of the doctrine. As these lines are being written, for example, I receive a letter from a scholarly and distinguished minister of one of our great Protestant denominations, in which he says, "I really find it difficult to believe in immortality." The more honest among the doubters admit, as did Thomas Huxley, that they do not know anything definite about the subject, and that they are therefore holding their minds in a state of suspension, until some certain evidence on the one side or on the other shall appear. But even these men confess that, in their heart of hearts, they do not believe that the immortality of the soul is a rational probability, and declare their expectation that this present life is "the be-all and the end-all" of existence. Who can forget, for example, the pathetic reflection, on the last page of the *Autobiography* of Herbert Spencer, which was penned in his advanced old age, on "the insoluble questions concerning our own fate," with the confession that there comes in his case "the thought, so strange and so difficult to realize, that with death there lapses both the consciousness of existence and the consciousness of having existed?"

III

It would be interesting to enumerate the causes which have been at work to bring about this

recent change in the attitude of the human mind toward the question of the eternal life. Thus we might speak of the extension of modern knowledge, which has given us a universe so greatly enlarged, both in space and time, as to eliminate altogether the old ideas of the life beyond the grave. There is that breaking down of the older conceptions of religious authority, which has done so much to weaken the hold of the traditional dogmas of the church on many minds, and open up the way to a thoroughgoing scepticism. Then there is that new analysis of the inner life, the distinctive feature of which is the breaking up of the single, unchanging, central personality, or soul, into what has come to be known as "the stream of consciousness." We no longer seem to have, or be, a self, but a rapidly forming succession of different selves, each one alien from all that have gone before and from all that will follow after. The soul, in other words, as a personal entity which remains eternally unchanged in the midst of change, seems to have disappeared entirely. Furthermore, we must not forget the new ethical ideals and social impulses which have taken possession of our hearts, and persuaded us that it is God's will that the vision of a redeemed humanity shall be fulfilled right here upon the earth, and that God does not need, therefore, any indefinite future for the fulfilment of his purposes. Then, too, there is that general shifting of our personal interest from the somewhat dim and shadowy affairs of a hypothetical next-

world, to the very concrete and appealing realities of the world right here and now before our face and eyes, which is the most obvious and impressive result of the scientific renaissance of the last century.

No one of these causes, however, nor all of them taken together, really explain the change which has come over the attitude of the human mind within the space of a single generation. These facts which have just been named might explain the prevailing lack of interest in the problem. But beyond this is the cloud of doubt which is hanging today over so many hearts, and the actual darkness of out-and-out denial which has enshrouded so many lives. And this can be explained only on the basis of another fact which has done more than anything else which could be mentioned to persuade intelligent, serious, well-informed, and spiritually-minded persons that the immortal life is after all nothing but an illusion.

I refer to the new light which has recently been shed upon the fact of personality by the scientific discoveries and investigations of modern times, and the new interpretation of the soul and its relation to the body, which has followed as a necessary consequence. It is not too much to say that we have a problem of immortality today, as one of the most vexing theological questions of our time, only because the old idea of the soul and the body, with which the conception of immortality was in every way consistent, has seemingly been destroyed by the new science of psychology; and

because this new psychology has brought us face to face with a new idea of the relation between the soul and the body, with which the conception of immortality seems to be in every way inconsistent. If the new psychology proves its case, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul would seem to be dismissed from further consideration; and it is because so many people think that the new psychology has already proved its case, that we find so great a change of attitude toward the doctrine in recent times. It is just here, in this physiological and psychological question of the relation between body and soul, that the real problem of immortality is to be found; and it is just here, therefore, that all discussion of the problem must begin. If we find an answer which is favourable to the spiritualistic hypothesis, or even neutral, then the more familiar arguments for the reality of the immortal hope, drawn from the fields of history, psychology, ethics, and religion, can be accepted for what they may be worth. But if we find here an answer which is even remotely unfavourable, then the question must be regarded as closed, and all further arguments rejected as worse than vain. It is to this question, therefore, that we must turn, before any other aspect of the problem can be discussed.

IV

The old doctrine of immortality, in so far as it had its basis in anything other than simple fear, or hope,

or out-and-out superstition, found its rational justification in the theory that a man's individuality consisted at bottom of a spiritual reality which we call the soul, and that this soul had a merely chance and temporary relation with the physical body which it inhabited. The body came from the dust, and in due process of time returned to the dust from which it came. The soul, however, came from God, and returned at the moment of death, which was none other than the moment of physical dissolution, to the Divine Spirit from which it came. The body was "of the earth, earthy," and therefore mortal; but the soul, which constituted the essence of personality, was "heavenly," and therefore immortal. Paul had this dual conception in mind when he described the body as a temple, in which the soul had its earthly abode; and again, in the great passage in his first letter to the Corinthians, when he pictured the soul, at the moment of death, as putting off "the natural body" which was corruptible and therefore mortal, and putting on the "spiritual body" which was incorruptible and therefore immortal.¹ Socrates shared this idea, when he said in his last talk with his disciples that there were two Socrateses—one the body, which was of no importance, and could be burned or buried as they saw fit, and the other the spirit which would escape from the body and "go to the joys of the blessed." Longfellow expressed the

¹ See I *Corinthians*, xv.

same idea, when he wrote in his *Psalm of Life*,

Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

This conception of a separable relation between these two realities, the soul and the body, was never worked out in the past in any true scientific way. All sorts of questions were asked as to when the soul entered the body, and when it went away, and how the relationship was joined and maintained; and endless discussions were held, in mediæval times, as to just in what organ of the body the soul had its abiding place. But the general idea that the soul was one thing and the body another, and that the two had no necessary or permanent connection was perfectly clear, and was accepted almost without question. The old tradition of the last moment in the life of the good St. Patrick, when the watchers by his couch saw a thin white vapour drift slowly upward from the lips of the dying man, and knew that this was his soul passing from earth to heaven, is only a very vivid, if somewhat crude, representation of the psychology which has enjoyed well-nigh universal approval until comparatively recent times.¹

¹ "Dr. Edward Clarke told Dr. O. W. Holmes that once, as he sat by the side of a dying woman, he saw, at the moment of death, 'a something rise from the body, which seemed like a departing presence.' . . . Dr. Holmes adds that he heard the same experience told, almost in the same words, by a lady whose testimony was eminently to be relied on. While watching her

Now it is in the acceptance in the past of this dual relation between the soul and the body that we find the real explanation of the fact that the doctrine of immortality has so seldom been called into dispute, even by the most critical and sceptical minds. It is perfectly evident, is it not, that, with such a theory of our personality as this in vogue, the faith in the immortality of the soul is not only the consistent but also the only rational conception of the future which the human mind can hold. Death means nothing to us but the dissolution of the body; and if the soul is independent of this body, then of course it is not necessarily, or even possibly, affected by its destruction. It simply abandons the body, at the moment of death, as you or I might abandon an outworn garment; and straightway puts on that "spiritual body," which St. Paul described as the fitting garment of the life beyond the grave. It is as impossible to believe, from the standpoint of such a psychological conception as this, that the soul dies when the body dies, as to think that a householder has necessarily perished because his home has been destroyed, or that the crew of a ship has necessarily been lost because the vessel itself has disappeared beneath the waves. So long as no essential connection is

parent, she felt aware, at the moment of death, of a 'something' which arose as if the spirit was perceived in the act of leaving the body. Dr. Clarke and Dr. Holmes seem both to have attached a certain weight to these phenomena."—James Freeman Clarke in *Ten Great Religions*, vol. ii., page 321.

recognized between the body and the soul, the immortality of the soul must be regarded as not only probable but certain. The only way in which this conception can possibly be shaken is to prove that the soul is a part of the body, or in some way tied up with the body, and the fate of the one therefore inextricably entangled with the fate of the other.

Now it is just this very thing, strangely enough, which seems to have been achieved by the various observations and discoveries of the science of our day. For the first time in the history of human thought, we have today an absolutely scientific psychology—a psychology which finds it just as natural to work in the laboratory as do chemistry and physics, and which formulates general laws upon the basis of observed phenomena almost as accurately as astronomy and biology. And it is the investigations and conclusions of this psychology which have overthrown, in the minds of many authoritative and unprejudiced students of the question, this old dualistic conception of personality upon which we have just been enlarging, and have forced upon us a new conception, which apparently robs the soul of its independence, and thus makes its destiny to be identical with that of the physical organism with which it is here united.

V

This new theory of the relation between the soul and the body, which has been put forward by

the new psychology, may be best summed up, perhaps, in the simple statement that the soul is nothing more nor less than one of the numerous functions of the body. The new psychology makes the personality a unit by asserting, that our "conscious mental phenomena are products of the organic tissues with which they are associated."¹ Of course, the mind, as a bodily function, is infinitely superior in character and results to any other function of which we have knowledge; but it is a function all the same, and therefore at bottom a manifestation of the same physical forces which "guide digestion, contract a muscle, or heal a wound." The soul, in other words, is immediately dependent upon the so-called "grey-matter" of our brains; or, as one of the earlier materialists expressed it in vivid phrase, "the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile."²

There are two significant reasons, among others less important, which may be offered in support of this theory of the identity of soul and body.

In the first place, it is a matter of common observation, to say nothing of scientific demonstration, that every change in a mental state is accompanied by some corresponding change in the nervous system—or to put it more cogently, that every mental state is the immediate result of some specific brain condition. Thus, it is evident that we can have no mental life at all, and therefore no

¹ See John Fiske's *Life Everlasting*, page 66.

² See *Ibid.*, page 67.

sensations, thoughts, affections, aspirations, unless we first be provided with the physical mechanism of a brain. Any arrest of brain development is directly followed by some degree of imbecility. A blow on the head causes unconsciousness, and, if it be severe enough, loss of memory. A clot of blood, or a bit of bone, pressing down upon the brain, will alter the whole mental, moral, and spiritual life of the victim; and the relief of this pressure will instantly restore normal conditions. But not only is thought in general thus dependent upon the brain, but physiologists and pathologists have also shown us that "various special forms of thinking are functions of special portions of the brain."¹ When we are thinking of things seen, one part of the brain is being used; when of things heard, another part; and when of things spoken, still a third part. From the standpoint of this theory, our brain has been minutely charted, according to the various divisions of our mental life. Further research along these lines, says Prof. William James, in a discussion of this subject, may make necessary a revision of some of our exact opinions; "yet so firmly established do the main positions worked out by the anatomists, physiologists, and pathologists of the brain appear, that the youth of our medical schools are everywhere taught unhesitatingly to believe them."²

The second argument for this thesis of the de-

¹ See reference in William James's *Human Immortality*, page 8.

² See *Ibid.*, page 9.

pendence of the mind upon the body is drawn from the doctrine of evolution. It is a well-known fact of course, that science, in the pursuit of its investigations during the last fifty or more years, has been able to trace the development of the physical organism, from the lowest unicellular creatures in the oozy slime of the primitive world upon the one hand, to the complicated mechanism of the human body upon the other. It may not, perhaps, be equally well-known that a development of the mind, as distinguished from the physical brain, has been similarly traced. The lowest stages of the nervous processes were nothing more than certain blind impulses, which were so feeble and so mechanical as hardly to be described as spontaneous. Gradually these impulses developed, in the higher forms of organic life, into what we know as instincts, and these instincts in turn into the exalted intellectual attributes of man. And always the development of the mental processes went along parallel with the development of the nervous system. The mind, in other words—or the soul, as we choose to call it—seems to have an origin which is just as far removed from the spiritual as the body. At bottom, it appears to be nothing more than the last stage of a slowly evolving bodily function. Our mental life is of course indefinitely more advanced than anything that we have ever seen in the lower animals, even those most nearly related, in the evolutionary process, to ourselves; but we differ apparently in degree, and not in kind,

and we share therefore in no attribute essentially different from those possessed by the birds of the air and the beasts of the field.

It is for reasons such as these, that the soul must be regarded not as a separate spiritual entity, having an origin apart from the body and existing independent of the body, but as one of the numerous specific functions of the body, and consequently dependent directly upon the physical processes of the body. And it is this well-accredited fact of science—so it is argued—which for evermore puts the doctrine of the immortality of the soul altogether out of court! It is obvious, is it not, that a function cannot operate or persist after the organ, of which it is the vital expression, has undergone decay or disintegration. It is a matter of everyday observation that all the functions of the physical organism instantly cease, in the same manner and at the same time, at the moment of death—and this must be as true of the function of the brain as of the function of any other organ of the body? To believe that the soul lives after the body dies!—how is this more sensible than to believe that digestion persists after the stomach has perished, or that circulation continues after the heart has ceased to beat? If the soul and the body are independent of one another, as used to be thought, the theory of immortality, as we have said, is not only reasonable but inevitable. But if the soul and the body are wrapped up together in the inextricable connection of organ and function,

then is the theory of immortality not only unreasonable but impossible. Such is the conclusion which has been drawn from the new psychology of our time—and it is just because this conclusion has become so wide-spread of recent years, and has been regarded as so axiomatic in character, that we find such general scepticism abroad as to the reality of the immortal hope.

VI

At first sight it may seem that our cause is hopeless, as there are few intelligent persons today who are not ready to agree that the old traditional psychology, which described the soul and the body as independent of one another, is fundamentally wrong, and that the new scientific psychology, which lays stress upon the dependence of the soul upon the body, is fundamentally right. Any such theory as that which represents the soul as something apart from the body—which declares that the soul is put into the body as a pill might be put into a bottle, and that it leaves the body, at the moment of death, as smoke or vapour might pour out of a vessel—would seem to be certainly too preposterous for serious consideration. The great word of modern science, in the field of psychology as in every other field, is *unity*—and this applies to the relation between soul and body, as to every other vital relation. To subscribe to any such crude utterance as that “the brain secretes thought as the

liver secretes bile," or that the mind is the function of the brain, in the literal meaning of these phrases, is manifestly as impossible as it is unnecessary. But to say that the physical and spiritual processes of life are parallel, and that there occurs no change of thought and feeling without a corresponding physical change in the nervous system, is only to give assent to a proposition which seems to be as well established as the law of gravitation or the Copernican system of the universe.

But is our cause really so hopeless as might appear upon the surface? If what we have been saying is true, in the obvious way in which it seems to be true, then the immortal life must certainly be regarded as an illusion. But is this actually the case? May it not be that we are too hasty in drawing our conclusions? Is it not at least possible that what seems to be one thing, may prove on closer examination, to be something altogether different? I am quite ready to agree that the modern psychologist is correct in his statement of the facts in regard to the dependence of the mind upon the body; but I am by no means ready to argue from this that he is equally correct in the interpretation which he places upon these facts. That the soul and the body have developed together, and now work together in this life, the one apparently as a function of the other, is perfectly plain. But that this means that the soul must end when the body ends, and that the great hope of immortality is therefore a vain and

foolish dream, does not necessarily follow by any manner of means. On the contrary, I would beg to point out at once that there are other interpretations of these same facts, wholly consistent with the idea that the soul may survive after the body has perished, which are just as reasonable, and therefore just as possible.

Take, for example, the fact of common observation which here underlies this whole philosophy of materialism that every change in a mental state is accompanied by a parallel change in the nervous system. That this fact may be interpreted in such a way as to make the mind a mere function of the brain and therefore as inseparable from the brain in the corruption of death as in the activities of life, is true. But it is also true that this interpretation is not the only one which is possible in its premises, and certainly not the one which is most probable. Indeed other interpretations of this phenomenon are so numerous, and all of them backed by such authoritative names, that it is difficult to know which to select for comparative consideration. There are three, however, which I venture to submit herewith, as possible alternatives of the materialistic thesis, not so much because they are the strongest, as because they are the ones with which I chance to be familiar. One is the interpretation offered by a great evolutionary philosopher; another, the interpretation offered by an eminent psychologist; and the third, the interpretation offered by a distinguished

physician. No one of these thinkers, it should be noted, is a churchman, or can be regarded as holding any special brief for religion.

VII

In the first place, there is the theory offered by John Fiske, in his book entitled *Life Everlasting*. Fiske points out most emphatically that the doctrine that thought is a function of the brain is a theory merely, which has not been proved and cannot in the nature of things be proved. So far as we know from our actual experience, mental life is nothing more nor less than an accompaniment—or “concomitant,” as he calls it—of the activities of the brain. Our “state of consciousness,” he says, “is the subjective equivalent of the vibration within the brain, whereof it is neither the cause nor the effect, neither the producer nor the offspring, but simply the concomitant.”¹ To regard the body as the cause of the soul, or the brain as the producer of the mind, is to make the same mistake that Chantecler made in Rostand’s great drama, when he assumed that the rising sun was the result of his crowing. Just because two things always go along together is no proof that there is a connection between them, or that either one is the cause of the other, although there is usually a presumption that this is the case. In this instance, however, not even the presumption points in this

¹ See *Life Everlasting*, page 78.

direction; for if we study the throng of activities that are perpetually succeeding one another within our nervous system, we shall find that they present, as Dr. Fiske expresses it, "a closed circle which is entirely physical, and in which one segment belongs to the nervous system."¹ Our conscious life parallels this circle at every point, but nowhere does it form any essential part of it. On the contrary, this "conscious life stands entirely outside of" the chain of our sensations and activities, "concentric with the segment which belongs to the nervous system,"² constituting a wholly different succession of phenomena. And under these circumstances, of course, the existence of the latter is by no means dependent upon the continued existence of the former. The body and the soul—the brain and the mind—may be compared to two railroad tracks which run along through a stretch of country side by side. By a person looking at the tracks as they run from one horizon to the other, it might be supposed that they have some necessary connection with one another, and that if one track should be destroyed and therefore come to an end, the other would immediately come to an end also. But as a matter of fact, the one track may stop at any point, and the other proceed along indefinitely. And so with the mind and the brain. Granted that, so far as we can see from the horizon of birth to the horizon of death, we always find the two things going along together!

¹ See *Life Everlasting*, page 79.

² *Ibid.*, page 79.

This does not necessarily mean that they must always go along together, and that one cannot exist without the other. The "possibility or the probability of the continuance of the one without the other," says Dr. Fiske,¹ is not affected at all by the fact that, within the limits of our finite and temporal experience, they are intimately connected. Concomitance does not necessarily involve functional dependence; and therefore he concludes that the question of the survival of the soul after death must be regarded, from this point of view at least, as an open question, to be determined by evidence which may be gathered by further inquiry in other directions.

A second interpretation of these phenomena is contained in *Human Immortality*, by Prof. William James. This great psychologist starts out by subscribing frankly to the truth of the physiological formula, that thought is a function of the brain. He then proceeds to ask, if this doctrine logically compels us to disbelieve in immortality? And he answers this question at once by declaring, "that, even though our soul's life may be in literal strictness the function of a brain that perishes, yet it is not at all impossible, but on the contrary quite possible, that the life may still continue when the brain itself is dead."²

This position would seem, at first sight, to be inconsistent. But James soon clears the air by

¹ See *Life Everlasting*, page 80.

² See *Human Immortality*, pages 9-10.

asserting that the argument of the materialist that thought cannot survive the disintegration of the brain, because it is a function of the brain, is based on a superficial and inadequate idea of what we mean by the idea of "function." The materialist takes it for granted that all function is "productive" in character; and therefore that the brain produces thought, as the tea-kettle produces steam, or the waterfall produces power, or the liver produces bile. "But in the world of physical nature," says Prof. James, "productive function is not the only kind of function with which we are familiar. We have also releasing or permissive function; and we have transmissive function."¹ As an example of what he calls "releasing or permissive function," he cites the trigger of a crossbow, which "removes the obstacle which holds the string, and lets the bow fly back to its natural shape."² As an example of transmissive function, he cites a prism or refractive lens, which catches up the energy of a ray of light, and determines it "to a certain path and shape."³ Now when we think of thought as a function of the brain, "we are not required to think of productive function only, but are entitled to consider permissive or transmissive function."⁴ It may be that the brain produces thought as the kettle produces steam; but it is just as logical, and just as fully in accord with scientific knowledge, to believe that the brain

¹ See *Human Immortality*, page 13.

³ *Ibid.*, page 14.

² *Ibid.*, page 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, page 15.

releases thought, as the trigger of a bow releases the arrow, or transmits thought as the prism transmits light. It is to this latter alternative that Prof. James inclines. He thinks of the natural universe as a kind of veil, hiding and keeping back the world of genuine spiritual reality. This veil, he contends, varies in thickness, in some places shutting out the spirit altogether, and at other places just letting through gleams of the radiance of the absolute life. At one place only does the veil grow so thin that the light of the spirit may shine through—and this place is marked by the brain! The spiritual life, in other words, is transmitted by the brain, and the transmission is clear or dim, radiant or obscure, according to the material condition of the transmitting medium. If we adopt such a supposition as this, he points out, the life of the soul must be regarded as just as much a function of the brain, as though it were actually produced by the brain—and all the phenomena of interdependence between the two are as explainable on the one basis as on the other. “The theory of production,” says Prof. James, “is not a jot more simple or credible in itself than any other conceivable theory.” It may be difficult to conceive how the brain can be an organ for limiting and determining a consciousness which is produced somewhere else, but it is equally difficult, to say the least, to conceive “how (the brain) can be an organ for producing consciousness out of whole cloth. For polemic purposes the two theories are exactly on a

par.”¹ The difference between the two lies only in the fact that, if the function of the brain be interpreted as transmissive, the conception of the immortality of the soul becomes at once not only possible but probable. According to this idea, indeed, there is no more reason why the soul should be regarded as dead when the body perishes, than that the light of the sun should be regarded as extinguished when the glass in my window, which transmits it, is covered by a curtain.

Lastly, and most important, as a possible interpretation of the meaning of this close psychological relation between soul and body, I would refer to that remarkable book entitled *Brain and Personality*, by Dr. W. H. Thomson, of New York. It is quite impossible, in the limited space here at my disposal, to give any adequate idea of the argument which this book presents; and especially is it hopeless to attempt to convey the wealth of exact and thorough scientific knowledge with which its pages are crowded. Suffice it to say, that here in this book we have the testimony of a most distinguished physician, who has spent a lifetime in the study of the anatomy of the brain and of the psychological processes of brain activity, and who recognizes the validity of all that has been discovered and formulated in regard to the material interdependence of mind and brain, and yet who offers, as the natural conclusion of his experience

¹ See *Human Immortality*, page 22.

and observation, an interpretation of what it all means which is exactly opposite to that which has usually been offered. He agrees absolutely with the material facts which have been discovered by the new psychology. Our various faculties of thought and emotion, which make up what we know as the mental life, are absolutely dependent, he says, not only upon the brain, but, as we have seen, upon specific parts of the brain. It is through the so-called mind areas of brain matter that a "human being knows what to think about the information which his senses bring. Cut out any one of these areas, and forthwith its particular kind of intelligence is gone."

All this sounds familiar enough. But how is this to be explained? It is when we come to Dr. Thomson's answer to this question that we encounter something new. The ordinary answer is, as we have seen, that thought is the product of the brain. But Dr. Thomson reverses this conclusion by declaring that the facts can only be explained on the theory that the brain is the product of thought. How are you going to explain a man, he asks, on any other hypothesis? Here, on the one hand, is the brain of an anthropoid ape, and here, on the other hand, is the brain of a man. Physically the gap between the two pieces of mechanism is so insignificant that it takes an expert to tell the difference between the two. But think of the difference between the two beings to whom the brains belong—the one using the brain

merely to register sensations and express impulses, and the other using the almost similar piece of mental machinery to conceive of a Panama Canal, to send wireless despatches through the air, to write a *Hamlet*, to compose a *Tristan und Isolde*, to speak the Sermon on the Mount! The brain of man, says Dr. Thomson, does not account for man. The only thing which can account for him and his achievements is the presence of a "Something" within his being which seizes upon the brain, molds it to its purposes, and uses it as a tool for the expression of its desire. This "Something" may be variously described as the Self, or the Will, or the Personality, or the Soul. But whatever it may be termed, it is a spiritual reality, which is independent of the body, and which uses the brain as an engineer uses his engine. "We make our own brains," says Dr. Thomson.¹ We inherit from the past a piece of mechanism, which is no higher, so far as its physical properties are concerned, than that possessed by the ape. Then our Personality, or Soul, seizes upon it, and by sheer force of will creates those areas of brain material which seem to be the sources of our thought. "Human brain matter does not become human in its powers until that Something within takes it in hand to fashion it."

I wish it were possible to describe here in detail the beautiful array of facts which Dr. Thomson marshalls before us for the demonstration of this

¹ See *Brain and Personality*, page 223.

interpretation of mental phenomena. One instance only I can mention—and this the most impressive of all—namely, that of Helen Keller. Here he tells us was a brain, which was shut off from all connection with the outer world, and was nothing, therefore, but the brain of an animal. Early in her life, Miss Keller's teacher, Miss Sullivan, set herself to work to reach Miss Keller's brain and awaken it. After long and patient effort this was done, and the little child was aroused to self-consciousness. Then Miss Sullivan persuaded Miss Keller's personality to undertake the work of producing a human brain. And thus little by little, two determined wills, or personalities, the one outside and the other inside, transformed this mechanism into a human machine, and made it the willing instrument of the woman who is now the wonder and admiration of the world. Miss Keller made her own brain, by sheer power of will or personality. "By practice, practice, practice, the will stimulus organized the brain centres to perform new functions." And what she did, under extraordinary circumstances, we are doing all the time, says Dr. Thomson, under ordinary circumstances. Considering that it is not brain which makes man, says this eminent physician, but man which makes his brain human, in its mental faculties, "I would even go so far as to say that if a human personality would enter a young chimpanzee's brain, where it would find all the required cerebral convolutions, that ape

could then grow into a true inventor or philosopher."¹

In all this, as we can see, Dr. Thomson exactly reverses the materialistic position. From his point of view, not the material brain, but the spiritual personality, is the great and original thing. This personality, he declares, has the same relation to the brain as a chauffeur to an automobile. Or, to quote another of his figures, the brain is the instrument of the thinker, exactly like the hand. Of course, so far as vital phenomena are concerned, the personality and its instrument always appear together, for the personality is dependent upon the mechanism of the brain for the expression of its thought, just as the chauffeur is dependent upon his machine for quick movement from one place to another. But this close relation of dependence between soul and body, does not mean that the personality cannot exist without the brain, or that it must necessarily end when the brain ends. It would be just as reasonable to think of a chauffeur being unable to exist away from his automobile, or necessarily dying when his machine is sent to the scrap-heap. All of which means, does it not, that in essence the personality, or the self, is independent of the body which it uses, and thus able to survive the body; and hence, for all that we know to the contrary, may very well be immortal. It is to this assertion that Dr. Thomson comes in the

¹ See *Brain and Personality*, page 239.

closing pages of his book. Death, he says, is like sleep. In both cases, the personality is absent from its instrument, the body. In the one case, it returns; in the other, it does not return. But it is no more probable that personality is extinguished after death, while it is permanently absent, than that it is extinguished during sleep, while it is temporarily absent. We sleep—but after sleep we wake!

VIII

Here, now, are three striking interpretations of that strange interrelation in this life between soul and body, the discovery of which constitutes one of the most important contributions of the new psychology to modern knowledge. All start out with a full acceptance of the reality of this intimate connection between mental processes and brain mechanism. But all refuse to recognize the validity of that interpretation of this connection which makes the existence of the former dependent upon the existence of the latter, and thus end with what certainly seems to be the closest kind of an approximation to the basic proposition of the old psychology, that mind and brain—or soul and body—are fundamentally independent. Fiske presents the theory of concomitants; James, the theory of permissive or transmissive function, as contrasted with productive function; Thomson the theory of personality as the creator and user of

brain material. Of all these doctrines, it may be said that, if they are worthy of any credence at all, they go far toward demonstrating the surprising fact that the old psychology and the new are not so far apart in their essential features as we have been taught to believe. The old psychology was undoubtedly blind to certain remarkable phenomena of mental dependence upon physical organism, and thus described the soul as free in a sense which was never true so far as this present earthly existence is concerned. These phenomena the new psychology discovered and observed, and thus was enabled to correct the exaggerations and inaccuracies inherent in the old ideas. But in so doing it went to an opposite extreme, and, on the basis of the certain fact of the dependence of the soul upon the body in this present life, for which it had abundant evidence, affirmed the very uncertain fact of the necessary and therefore continued dependence of the soul upon the body after death, of which it had no evidence whatsoever. Now at last are we getting back to the middle ground of sanity. That the facts of the new psychology are true, nobody thinks today of denying. But that these facts are consistent only with a materialistic interpretation of human life is being more widely and more emphatically denied every hour. On the contrary, we are beginning to see that there are numerous ways in which these facts can be interpreted in harmony with the old spiritualistic thesis which was the crown and glory of the old

psychology. Crude this psychology certainly was. It was oblivious of a myriad of vital facts; and it misunderstood woefully the facts of which it was aware. Now we see these facts, and are beginning to understand them. And lo! "the paradox, which comforts while it mocks"—that the new facts are leading us straight back to the old conclusion of the reality of things spiritual!

IX

And now, what have we accomplished by our long discussion of this vexing problem? Have we proved that the spiritualistic interpretation of the great fact of the interrelation of mind and body, as opposed to the materialistic interpretation, is true, and that immortality therefore is a reality? Not at all! At this point in our argument at least, the question of the eternal life still remains unanswered.

What we have done is this! We have taken up, without any dodging of the facts, the only serious argument which has ever been advanced against the possible reality of the immortal life, and shown that this argument is not conclusive. Science has undertaken to demonstrate a negation, and we have shown that this attempt has ignominiously failed. This does not mean that immortality has been proved. But it does mean that immortality has not been disproved. It means that the intellect, on the basis of all known data bearing

upon the problem, confesses its inability to affirm and its equal inability to deny. It means that the field is open for further inquiry; and that we have the right—nay the duty—to consider all the probabilities in the case. As John Fiske expresses it, we have removed “the only serious objection that has ever been alleged against” the immortal hope, and thus cleared the field “for those general considerations of philosophic analogy and moral probability which are all the grounds upon which we can call for help in this arduous inquiry.”¹ For thousands of years men have believed in the immortality of the soul, as a necessary part of the moral and spiritual life. A thousand considerations based on analogies of nature, suggestions of experience, instincts of the mind, impulses of the heart, prophecies of the soul, have moved men to the acceptance of this great hope. Philosophers have argued that it must be true; poets have sung of the beauty of its reality; preachers have summoned the soul to prepare for its certain coming. “God created man to be immortal”—this has been the faith of all the ages gone. Only within our own time has doubt been cast upon the reality of the expectation by a new scientific theory of the soul, which has been inconsistent with our faith. But now is this theory matched by others no less rational, with which the immortal hope is consistent. Thus may we listen again to the analogies and arguments, the hopes and prophecies, of the

¹ See *Life Everlasting*, page 81.

ages, and be persuaded, if we find them to have the power to persuade. William James sums up our whole accomplishment at this point in our discussion, when he says: "In strict logic, the fangs of the cerebralistic materialism are drawn. My words ought already to exert a releasing function on your hopes. You *may* believe henceforward, whether you care to profit by the permission or not."¹

¹ See *Human Immortality*, page 19.

CHAPTER III

INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY

“Precisely what is unexpressed here, then, in our world of mortal glimpses of truth, precisely what is sought and longed for, but never won, in this our human form of consciousness, just that is interpreted, is developed into its true wholeness, is now in its fitting form, and is expressed, in all the rich variety of individual meaning that love here seeks, but cannot find, and is expressed too as a portion, unique, conscious, and individual, of an Absolute Life that even now pulsates in every one of our desires for the ideal and for the individual. We all even now really dwell in this realm of a reality that is not visible to human eyes. . . . Of this our true life, our present life is a glimpse, a fragment, a hint, and in its best moments a visible beginning. That this individual life of all of us is not something limited in its temporal experience to the life that now we experience, follows from the very fact that here nothing final is found expressed.”—*Josiah Royce, in The Conception of Immortality, pages 74-75.*

THE question of immortality is now open for consideration. We can believe in immortality if we can find any good reasons for so doing. This brings us at once to the inquiry as to whether there are any arguments which may be offered in support of a favourable answer. Are there any

grounds for believing that the theory of a life beyond the grave is a more rational, or less irrational, hypothesis than the theory that death is the end? Are there any intimations within our own hearts of a continued existence which can be regarded as having validity? Is there any argument, or experience, or revelation which can be accepted, in the absence of positive proof, as good circumstantial evidence of the doctrine of eternity, as similar evidence is accepted under similar conditions, for example, in a court of law? Prophets, poets, philosophers have been offering their belief in immortality from the very earliest periods of history down to our own time, and in these affirmations is to be found much of the noblest literature of the world. But in all the many statements which these men have given of their visions, hopes, and speculations, are there any definite, clear-cut declarations which can stand the acid test of reason? The question is open—but has one suggestion of either mind or heart ever been offered, which can justify us in forming a definitely favourable conclusion?

I

First of all, before coming to the enumeration of the many excellent reasons which can be found for accepting the reality of the immortal hope, let me point out one significant fact which cannot safely be disregarded in any discussion of this general

problem. I refer to the fact that the greatest thinkers, wisest sages, and most inspired prophets of all ages have believed in the immortality of the soul as one of the cardinal doctrines of human life. This agreement is by no means unanimous, of course, as a long line of doubters or deniers from Epicurus to Hugo Münsterberg clearly indicates. But it is nevertheless only sober truth to affirm that the consensus of the best thought and the profoundest emotion is indubitably favourable to the idea that death is not the end.

This fact I call important for the reason that wide knowledge and deep thought must be regarded as authoritative in this field of speculation as in every other. When we study a question in astronomy, for example—such a question as that pertaining to the ultimate destiny of this planet upon which we are now swinging through the endless reaches of cosmic space—we consult “the authorities upon the subject,” as we call them; that is, the men who, as special students of astronomy, are conversant with all the facts, and are competent, therefore, to give judgment in a problem upon which no man can speak with absolute assurance. And if there is any diversity of opinion, what do we do but find what is the consensus of the best thought, and follow that? Or, to turn to a question somewhat more closely analogous to that which is before us for discussion in this book, suppose we are investigating the perennial enigma of free-will and determinism!

Do we not do the same thing here that we do in the field of astronomy—namely, consult authorities upon the subject, from Plato and Aristotle in ancient times to Mill, Spencer, and James in modern times; find out what conclusion these great thinkers have reached, and then form our opinions on the basis of what seems to be the weight of testimony? In all such cases as these, of course, we carry on independent researches of our own—or should do so. But however zealous and efficient we may be in the pursuit of our personal investigations, we cannot safely remain ignorant of what the greatest thinkers have concluded, nor ignore their conclusions in the formation of our own judgments.

Now why should we not follow exactly this same course in dealing with this peculiarly baffling problem of immortality? Why should we not, at the outset at least of our study of this question, seek the opinions of those who are competent to speak? And if we do this, what do we find if not that the majority of the world's greatest thinkers and wisest prophets have believed implicitly in the immortality of the soul? So impressive is this majority indeed, and so supreme the authority of the individuals composing it, that, if there were no other reason for believing in the reality of this hope, there might be valid excuse for accepting this as all-sufficient. When we run through the mighty catalogue of the Greek and Roman philosophers, the distinguished rôle of the metaphysicians and

speculative theologians of the Middle Ages, the overwhelming array of modern thinkers from Descartes and Spinoza to T. H. Green and Sir Oliver Lodge; when we scan the stupendous list of the religious leaders of our race from the prophets of ancient Israel to the preachers of modern Protestantism; when we meditate on how poets have sung, and seers have had their visions, and wisemen have made their logical deductions; when we find philosophers, theologians, prophets, priests, poets, seers, all arrayed upon the side of the immortal hope—the brains of unnumbered ages and uncounted nations placed, almost with one accord, in this pan of the balances; may we not be pardoned, perhaps, for feeling convinced, and asking for no higher evidence? If the immortal hope is indeed a snare and a delusion, then at least, as James Martineau has eloquently pointed out,

We know who are those who are mistaken. Not the mean and grovelling souls who never reached to so great a thought; not the drowsy and easy natures, who are content with the sleep of sense through life, and the sleep of darkness ever after; not those of selfish conscience, of small thought, and smaller love. No . . . the deceived are the great and holy, whom all men revere; the men who have lived for something better than their happiness and spent themselves on the altar of human good. Whom are we to reverence, and what can we believe, if the inspirations of the highest created natures are but cunningly-devised fables.¹

¹ See *Endeavours after the Christian Life* (Am. Ed.), page 117.

In his illuminating little book on *Science and Immortality*, referred to above, Dr. William Osler quotes Cicero as declaring, in reference to the question of immortality, that he had rather be wrong with Plato than right with those who deny. "This," adds the great physician, "is my own *confessio fidei*."¹ That this is an extreme, and therefore, logically speaking, an inadmissible statement, goes without saying. But it at least serves the admissible purpose, and therefore has the rhetorical excuse, of indicating with startling force the overwhelming significance of the historical fact that the finest intellects, bravest hearts, and most exalted souls have united in declaring that man was not born to die!

II

It is manifestly impossible, however, to decide our question here, no matter how great the degree of our personal conviction upon the ground just stated. No progress in thought would ever be achieved, did not men, while paying reverent tribute to all the thinkers who have preceded them, go straight to the original facts and there gather at first hand the material out of which to construct the edifice of their own thought. We must return, therefore, to our original inquiry as to whether there are any good reasons for believing in immortality. What considerations have persuaded the

¹ See *Science and Immortality*, page 43.

great majority of the best thinkers of the past to accept this faith; what new considerations, if any, have appeared in our own day; and what validity, if any, have these considerations, old and new, for the mind of the modern man?

Most familiar of the arguments for the reality of the eternal life is, of course, the plea which is based upon the universality of the belief. All men, it is said, have always believed in the immortality of the soul.

All men desire to be immortal [says Theodore Parker]. This desire is instinctive, natural, universal. . . . It belongs to the human race. You may find nations so rude that they live houseless in caverns of the earth, nations that have no letters, not knowing the use of bows and arrows, fire, or even clothes, but no nation without a belief in immortal life.¹

It is the very universality of this great idea in the history of the human race, its very persistence in the face of every doubt and every denial, its repeated resurrection in the hearts of men after its entombment by atheistical philosophy or materialistic science—it is this which constitutes the best possible proof that the immortal life is not a futile superstition, but a faith corresponding to reality.

As ordinarily stated—namely, that belief in the immortal life constitutes a conception which is

¹ See *A Sermon on Immortal Life* (Centenary Edition), vol. iii., page 320.

universal in human thought—this argument, to my mind, has very little cogency. And this for two reasons!

In the first place, it is doubtful if the hope of, or belief in, immortality has ever been quite so universal as we imagine. The greatest minds, as we have seen, have always concerned themselves with this problem, and most of them have been lifted to the acceptance of the eternal hope. But Dr. Osler's affirmation that "the desire for immortality seems never to have had a very strong hold upon mankind, and the belief is less widely held than is usually stated,"¹ is not without some basis in fact. Certainly there has always been a respectable minority which has doubted and in some cases denied. No nobler defence of the doctrine was ever penned than the famous passage found in the Apocryphal book of *The Wisdom of Solomon*, beginning with the majestic line, "God created man to be immortal;" but nothing is more evident than the fact that this passage was conceived and written by the author in answer to certain teachers of his day who were declaring "that there is no healing when a man cometh to his end, neither was any man known to return from the grave." Nor have these sceptics always been "the ungodly," as this author somewhat rashly asserts, or those whom "their own ignorance hath blinded."² On the contrary, these doubters have

¹ See *Science and Immortality*, page 9.

² See *Wisdom of Solomon*, chaps. ii. and iii.

sometimes been the purest and noblest of men, and sometimes too, men of transcendent intellectual power and far-reaching knowledge. In short, a candid study of human experience and an unprejudiced survey of human thought, shows beyond all question that belief in immortality, as a fixed conviction of the soul, is by no means as universal as has many times been declared. Man's doubt upon this question is at least as persistent if not as impressive as his faith; and his suspicion, or fear, that it is a delusion is well-nigh as characteristic as his hope that it is a reality. The voices of the dissenters and questioners are by no means as numerous nor as eloquent as those upon the other side, but they are a part of the great chorus of humanity all the same, and must not be disregarded in our estimate of this intimation.

But there is a second reason why the universality of the immortal hope, which has been so frequently assumed, has little cogency as an argument for its validity. I refer to the fact that the universal acceptance of an opinion or idea, has no essential connection with its truth, and cannot be accepted therefore as an evidence of its truth. Suppose, for example, that assent to the conception of immortality were really as unanimous as has sometimes been supposed. What reason have we for believing, upon the basis of this fact, that the conception corresponds to reality? There was a time when men believed that the heavens were peopled with gods, the forests with nymphs and dryads,

the sea with mighty monsters, but this did not prove that these strange beings were actually existent. There was a time when men believed in miracles, but this belief did not alter by a single hair's breadth the unvarying uniformity of law. There was a time when men believed that the sun moved round the earth and that the earth itself was flat, but it only needed the telescope of Copernicus and the *Santa Maria* of Columbus to show to men their error. And why may not the same thing be true of this idea of immortality? Why should we not be finally undeceived upon this matter as we have already been undeceived upon so many other matters to which we have given our unanimous assent? Why may not the immortal hope be only one of the last of that long succession of superstitions, dreams, and errors, from which it has been the lot of man to be delivered one by one? What, after all, is the history of human development upon the mental side, but the amazing story of man's perpetual disillusionment? A thousand views of life and destiny have been accepted by the human mind as the unquestioned interpretation of things seen and heard and felt, only to be swept away by the discovery of wonders beneficent or dreadful, of which man has never even dreamed. Again and again has he been made to see that "things are not what they seem"—that his vision deceives, his heart betrays, his mind fails to understand. Again and again has he been obliged to tear down his whole philosophy of life

and build anew from the foundation up. Again and again has he seen his surest ideas and finest hopes cast ruthlessly into the ash-heap, and his mind swept clean of every familiar and well-loved article of faith. And if this has been man's experience with all his other early and universal beliefs, why should he hope to be spared this which is the last and oldest relic of them all?

It is for reasons such as these that man's belief in immortality, whether it be universal or otherwise, cannot be regarded in itself as offering a definite or conclusive argument for the reality of the life beyond the grave. We come face to face with a very different consideration, however, when we look upon the immortal hope not as a belief to be accepted but as an idea to be explained. For the idea of immortality, whatever may be said about the acceptance of the idea, is a phenomenon which *is* universal. It may be that there have been men who have disbelieved in the eternal life, and have banished it from their thoughts and desires; but never yet has there been a man who has not found the conception within his heart, and been challenged to ponder and answer the problems which it has raised. Those who have denied their belief in immortality most vigorously have oftentimes been the ones who have met the idea of immortality most nearly and felt it most deeply. Every denial, indeed, of the reality of the idea has only been added confirmation of the presence of the idea within the soul as a problem of thought and a

condition of life. In every age, in every church, in every race, in every solitary bosom, has the conception appeared—"a fact of man's nature," says Theodore Parker, "and a part of the universe, just as the sun is a fact of the heavens and a part of the universe." The idea of immortality, he asserts with perfect accuracy, is

an ontological fact and belongs essentially to the being of man, just as the eye is a physiological fact and belongs to the body of man. . . . It is written in human nature; written there so plain that the rudest nations have not failed to find it; . . . written just as much as form is written in the circle, and extension on matter in general . . . As a man attains consciousness of himself, he attains consciousness of his immortality. . . . It comes as naturally as the notions of time and space. It comes by intuition . . . in the same way as comes the belief in God, the love of man, the sentiment of justice.¹

The idea of immortality, in other words, is as instinctive as religion. Nay, it is a part of religion and thus as real, or unreal, as God and the soul!

The significance of this universal presence of the idea of immortality within the human mind, as an intimation of a reality corresponding to the idea, has ever been apparent to the prophetic mind. Theodore Parker defined this significance with splendid power, in his great *Sermon on Immortal Life*, when he said,

¹ See *A Sermon on Immortal Life*, Centenary Edition, vol. iii., pages 321-22.

What is thus in man is writ there of God, who writes no lies. To suppose that this universal desire has no corresponding gratification, is to represent God not as the Father of all, but as only a deceiver. / I feel the longing after immortality a desire essential to my nature, deep as the foundation of my being. . . . I feel conscious of immortality; that I am not to die—no, never to die, though often to change. / I cannot believe that this desire and consciousness are felt only to mislead, to beguile, to deceive me. . . . For my own part, I can conceive of nothing which shall make me more certain of immortality. I ask no argument from learned lips. No miracle could make me more sure—no, not if the sheeted dead burst cerement and shroud, and rising forth from their honoured tombs stood here before me . . . no, not if the souls of all my sires since time began came thronging round, and with miraculous speech told me they lived and I should also live. I could only say, "I knew all this before, why waste your heavenly speech."¹

The real significance of this great fact, however, could not be made apparent until the science of evolution had laid bare the secret of man's being, and revealed the intimations of his soul as their own best verification. When Herbert Spencer gave to the world his epoch-making exposition of life as "the continuous adjustment of inner relations to outer relations,"² he established at one stroke what his disciple and interpreter, Dr. John Fiske, later called "the everlasting reality of

¹ See Centenary Edition, vol. iii., page 322.

² See *Principles of Biology*, vol. i., page 99.

religion"—and by the same token also, of course, the everlasting reality of religion's great postulate of the undying soul. What is meant by this assertion, and what bearing it has upon the idea of immortality can be made plain in a very few words!

By the definition of life as "the continuous adjustment of inner relations to outer relations," Spencer meant simply that in the outer world of reality there is a vast complexity of phenomena, and that an organism—vegetable, animal, or human—is alive just in so far as it is able to adjust itself to these phenomena. If life is extinct, there is no adjustment, as when a tree fails to put forth leaves when touched by the warm breezes of the early spring. If life is of a low order, the adjustments are few in number and more or less clumsy in operation, as in the case of the polyp which can do little more than extend or contract its tentacles in response to outward vibrations and contacts. If life is of a high order, the adjustments are many and accurate, as in the case of "the keen-scented bloodhound and the far-sighted vulture," to say nothing of the primates and man himself.

Development from the lower plants to the higher mammals represents a stupendous progression of life, all achieved through the preservation and propagation of those creatures which have been most successful in adjusting themselves to the outer relations of the environment, and every step marked by the attainment of some physical or mental faculty which has enabled the animal

possessing it to adjust itself more swiftly and surely to its own environment and also to reach out to a wider and more complex environment beyond. When life began upon this planet, it was nothing but a germ or cell, possessed of but one sensibility, that of touch, and marked by but one faculty, that of extension and contraction. From this feeble beginning, life slowly evolved through countless stages of development, differentiating its sensibilities and adding to the number of its faculties, until at last it unfolded into the variety of highly organized creatures which we now see upon the earth. All by the "almost infinitely slow increments of adjustment upon adjustment," as John Fiske puts it!¹ And every stage of this development, be it noted, has been called into being, and preserved as an element of progress, in direct response to the influence of actual existences in the outer world. Thus, for example, life was originally blind—there was no such thing as sight; but in course of time the nerves of vision were differentiated from the nerves of touch, in response to the outward existence of radiant light, and we have the eye! In the same way, the living organism was originally deaf—there was no such thing as hearing; but in course of time again, in response to the outward existence of acoustic vibrations, nerves were developed which were sensitive to sound as distinct from touch, and we have the ear! And so faculty after faculty

¹ See *Through Nature to God*, page 182.

has been developed, like the eye and the ear, each in response to some stimulus in the outer world, and each maintained by the relations which it continually enjoys with that stimulus. Every attribute that we possess, in other words, has been brought into being by some existing outward fact, and by that token is a living demonstration of the abiding reality of the fact. The eye proves the reality of light, the ear the reality of sound, the whole complex organic mechanism the reality of the complex material world, of which it is at once the reflection and the witness! To sum up the matter in a very crude and yet vivid parable—the living organism is related to the universe as a coin is related to a die. The unmarked gold is placed in the stamping-machine and slowly the die sinks into its texture until every mark upon the die has been transferred to the surface of the gold. The mere appearance of a line or a figure on the surface of the finished coin is all the proof that is needed of the original presence of that line or figure on the die. In the same way, the living organism is placed in what we may call the stamping-machine of the universe. Slowly, through the long ages of the past, the die of outward reality has been pressed down upon the yielding texture of the organism, until every fact in the enviring universe has made its indelible impression in the shape of organ, faculty, and idea. And as with the coin, so with the organism, the presence of each inner attribute and power proves the actual exist-

ence in the outer world of the reality by which it has been created and to which it corresponds!

Now the significance of all this becomes apparent, from the point of view of the idea of immortality, when we remember that there came a wonderful moment, in the onward march of the evolutionary process, when man began to develop faculties which showed him upon the instant to be something more than the brutes from whose loins he had sprung. It was at this time that the family came into existence, that social ties began to be knit, that art began to mould its first vessels and fashion its earliest weapons, that crude words began to be spoken and rough markings to be scratched upon stones, that nascent ideas of right and wrong began to germinate within the mind, and strange and terrible ideas of gods and demons to reveal a realm which eye had not seen nor ear heard! At this moment the human soul was being born, in response to influences from the outer world as real as the light waves which called into being the eye as an organ of vision, or the acoustic vibrations which called into being the ear as an organ of hearing. Every moral and spiritual power which now began slowly to make its appearance, was only man's answer to the discovery of a new and higher environment, and a condition of successful adjustment to that environment. In all the mental stirrings, spiritual strivings, and social struggles of this momentous period of development, we see only the instinctive

attempt of man to adjust his inner relations to the outer relations of an Unseen World which he cannot understand, but which he feels to be as real a thing as the fleeting phenomena of time and space. And all the long history of humanity, from that dim and distant epoch down to our own day, is only the painful and yet glorious story of man's endeavour to perfect this adjustment and verify this experience. Religion, as the attempt of man to get into right relations with his spiritual as contrasted with his material environment, "is the largest and most ubiquitous fact connected with the existence of mankind upon the earth."¹ What man's development would have been without it is quite beyond imagination!

Now what this all means as an intimation of the reality of the Unseen World must be evident at this point without further argument. If anything is clear, it is that man's consciousness of God, the soul, immortal life, his persistent endeavour to verify this consciousness and answer the problems which it has raised, and his development and utilization of spiritual faculties as means of adjustment to the invisible realm revealed by this consciousness, are themselves the only verification that we need of "the everlasting reality of religion." As the eye proves the existence of light and the ear the existence of sound, so may we not say that "the human soul vaguely reaching forth toward . . . an eternal world not visible to the

¹ See *Through Nature to God*, page 189.

sense,"¹ gives us something very akin to a proof of the existence of this world? John Fiske, in his famous essay upon this subject, has stated the matter with a degree of finality which makes full quotation inevitable.

If the relation thus established [he says], is a relation of which only the subjective term is real and the objective term is non-existent, then, I say, it is something utterly without precedent in the whole history of creation. All the analogies of evolution, so far as we have yet been able to decipher it, are overwhelmingly against any such supposition. To suppose that during countless ages . . . the progress of life was achieved through adjustments to external realities, but that then the method was all at once changed and throughout a vast province of evolution the end was secured through adjustments to external non-realities, is to do sheer violence to logic and common sense. . . . So far as our knowledge of Nature goes the whole momentum of it carries us onward to the conclusion that the Unseen World, as the objective term in a relation of fundamental importance that has co-existed with the whole career of mankind, has a real existence. . . . The lesson of evolution is that through all these weary ages the human soul has not been cherishing in religion a delusive phantom, but in spite of seemingly endless groping and stumbling it has been rising to the recognition of its essential kinship with the ever-living God.²

Thus does the thought of immortality, when regarded not as a belief to be accepted but as an

¹ See *Through Nature to God*, page 188. ² *Ibid.*, pages 189-90.

idea to be explained, present to us the argument for its own verification. The fact that man, from the very earliest period of his existence, has had this extraordinary idea of an eternal life, of which the life that now is gives no least suggestion—the fact that all men have had this idea, have never been able to get away from it, have never succeeded in killing it by their disbelief or weakening it by their doubt, have always tried to solve its problems and overcome its difficulties, and especially have found in it the answer to their noblest hopes, highest aspirations, and deepest affections—all this would seem to be the sure adaptation of the struggling spirit to the reality of the Unseen. More significant than any belief in immortality is man's unending search for grounds for such belief. More impressive than the occasional vision of seer or saint, is the constant presence of the mere idea in every humblest life. In his great essay upon *Immortality*, Ralph Waldo Emerson tells of two men, just now identified in the last volume of his *Journals* as Albert H. Tracy and Lewis Cass,¹ who early in life spent much of their time together in earnest search for some proof of immortality. An accident separated them, and it was not till some twenty-five years later that they chanced to meet. They said nothing, "but shook hands long and cordially. At last his friend said, 'Any light, Albert?' 'None,' replied Albert. 'Any light, Lewis?' 'None,' he replied." And so

¹ See *Journals*, volume x., page 120.

they parted, their long search still unended. And Emerson says of this impressive incident, "that the impulse which drew those two minds to this inquiry through so many years was a better affirmative evidence for immortality than their failure to find a confirmation was a negative."¹

III

In all that we have just been saying about this idea of immortality, it must have been evident that man is obviously a being who belongs not so much to the visible realm of the senses and things material as to the invisible realm of thought and spirit. The idea of immortality is wonderful in itself, as we have just seen; but more wonderful still is the fact that in man we have a creature who is capable of having such an idea. Never certainly, until man appeared upon the scene, was there a mind big enough to recognize it, or a soul mighty enough to receive and welcome it. Between man and his animal progenitors, in other words, there is one fundamental distinction, if no other—that the human creature is possessed of emotions, ideas, impulses, aspirations, purposes, which never enter even momentarily within the consciousness of the brute creature of the jungle

¹ See *Immortality*, in *Letters and Social Aims*, page 270.

"I have never seen what to me seemed an atom of proof that there is a future life. And yet—I am strongly inclined to expect one."—Mark Twain, in *Mark Twain: A Biography*, by Albert Bigelow Paine, vol. iii., page 1431.

or the plain. With the animal, the physical life is all-important, nay the sole consideration. His search for food and propagation of his kind, his instincts which teach him with startling accuracy to shun injury and flee from peril, his brief periods of parental watchfulness and affection—all these are qualities directed to but one end, the perpetuation of the physical existence of the individual and, through the individual, of the species. With man, however, we find the physical subordinated to the mental, moral, and spiritual. The life of the flesh, which absorbs the energies of the brute, man deems to constitute the lowest and therefore the least important part of his nature. Just in so far as he rises above the low plain of his outward physical existence and mounts to the heights of the intellectual and spiritual, does he begin to fulfil the true measure of his manhood. Just in so far, indeed, as he is willing, if need be, to bruise and break and cast away the body for the sake of the higher interests of the soul, is he in reality a man in the literal sense of that mighty word. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." He has a body, with demands that must be satisfied and rights that must be observed, but he has also a heart and soul with greater demands and loftier rights. He carries with him the instincts of the flesh—normal, natural, healthful, every one—but above and beyond these does he carry with him those ideas and ideals, those dreams and

visions, which disclose a world to which no flesh is heir. He eats and sleeps and reproduces his kind, like any wild creature of the field or forest, but he also plays with lines and figures, translates thoughts into words, chants hymns of praise, paints visions of beauty, loves and forgives, laughs at joy and weeps at sorrow, suffers for a cause, dies for a gleam of human betterment, cherishes a hope of life eternal! All this is as native to his existence, as spawning to the fish, nesting to the bird, or mating to the jungle lion. Man, like the God in whose image he is made, is spirit, and therefore lives, loves, and worships in spirit and in truth!

Now just here, in this isolation and elevation of man as a spiritual being, do we have what may be described perhaps as that one intimation of immortality which transcends and hence includes all others. For the significant thing about this distinction between man and his poor relation, the animal, as James Martineau has pointed out in his *Study of Religion*, is to be found in the fact that "the outfit of the animal seems an ideal provision for the purely terrestrial sphere in which he is placed, while the outfit of man, if the terrestrial sphere be all that is appointed for him, seems clearly a vast over-provision." The animal has all that he needs for his earthly existence; the man has this and infinitely more, which seems to have no relation to the necessities of his present career. If this life be all, what need has man of these stupendous mental powers, intense moral convic-

tions, lofty spiritual aspirations, which characterize him as a being apart from the rest of evolving life? If death be the end, how shall we reconcile this vast endowment of spiritual force with an environment for which the physical endowment of the animal is found to be an adequate provision? If the only problem that faces a man is that of living for sixty or seventy years upon this earth, ere he passes into oblivion, why should he be moved, as by some power not himself, to give his strength and days to laborious historical researches, to profound metaphysical speculations, to the rapture of poetry and the thrill of music, to the dreaming of dreams and the seeing of visions, to struggles, sacrifices, and sufferings for human betterment, to the thought of God and the hope of immortality? What place have any of these things in this strictly terrestrial sphere of existence? If this world be all, then is not the swiftness of the deer or the strength of the lion a more useful attribute than the brain of a Plato, and the acute hearing of the dog or the far vision of the eagle a richer endowment than the heart of a Christ? If the scope of life be bounded in space by this planet and in time by the Psalmist's span of years, then must we not regard that fateful moment in the evolutionary process, pointed out by Alfred Russel Wallace and his compeers, when the further development of the body as a whole was sacrificed to the indefinite development of the single organ of the brain, as a fatal moment, and all development since

that time as marking not progress but retrogression? In the face of all the facts, is there any escape from the conclusion that the mere brute is perfectly adapted to the needs of this terrestrial existence, while man is cumbered by a vast accumulation of extraneous attributes which only bring him labour and sorrow all his days?

Such a conclusion, however, is manifestly impossible! In the divine economy of this great universe, no such maladjustment of conditions is thinkable! When we find man dowered with these marvellous faculties of mind and spirit, it means but one thing—that his life, unlike that of the brute, is adapted to the conditions of a sphere far transcending that in which he is now living—that he is the denizen of a spiritual world, the heir of an eternal life, wherein his powers of soul may find their true purpose and fulfilment. Man was never dowered with such a mind, or heart, or soul merely to enable him to meet the conditions of such a material environment as this which now we see. He was thus equipped, we may be sure, because of his destiny to greater and higher issues. Consider the range of man's thought, the sweep of his love, the unfathomed depths of his sorrow and his joy! Recall the persistence of his dreams, the glory of his deeds, the sublimities of his self-sacrifice! Remember his willingness to forget all creature comforts for the sake of a song that he must sing, to endure reproach and shame and bodily suffering

for the sake of a cause that he must serve, to be "stoned, sawn asunder, slain with the sword," for the sake of a love for humankind that he must heed! And who can doubt his immortality? ~~1~~

I can best sum up what is involved in "this great argument," perhaps, by resorting once again to parable. I go down to one of the great docks which line the water-front of New York, and there I find a little vessel, which is of weak construction, manned by a scant crew of three or four, laden with provisions adequate for a week only, equipped with means for meeting the hazards of only the lightest seas. I know at once, from the whole character and outfit of this ship, that she is a coaster, bound for no more distant port than Baltimore or Portland. Close by, I see another vessel of quite a different character. She is superb in every rope and timber, built with a strength calculated to withstand the mightiest gales that blow, manned by a large and disciplined crew, and stocked with provisions which might last a year or more. And here again I know at once, from the mere appearance and equipment of the ship, that she is a merchantman, bound for the most distant ports of Africa and Asia.

So also with man! Is it not true of him, as of the merchantman, that the equipment points with perfect accuracy to the character and direction of the voyage?¹

¹ See James Martineau's *Study of Religion*, vol. ii., pages 347-59.

IV

Just here, in this consideration of man's essential nature as a spiritual and not a material being, do we have an intimation of immortality so fundamental as to present a variety of aspects, each one of which is important enough to call for independent treatment as an argument for the eternal hope.

In the first place, there is what we may call the scientific argument, which is founded upon the modern conception of *persistence* or *conservation*.

This idea received its first expression in the now familiar doctrine of the indestructibility of matter. In the old days, the notion was universally current that matter was a kind of "variable quantity," which was able to appear out of nothing as readily as it was able to disappear into nothing. The Christian dogma of the creation of the world in the beginning and an ending of the world on some fateful "last day," was based upon this idea, and persists in our time only as this idea itself persists. Outside of the narrowing circle of persons who are utterly ignorant and superstitious, however, this conception of the nature of matter has in our time vanished. Today, as Herbert Spencer has told us, "the doctrine that matter is indestructible has become a commonplace. All the apparent proofs that something can come out of nothing, a wider knowledge has one by one cancelled."¹ The star that suddenly disappears in the night

¹ See *First Principles*, page 177.

sky, has only moved out of our range of vision, just as the comet that unexpectedly flames from out the darkness is not newly created, but has come for the first time within our ken. Tyndall's "streak of morning cloud" that "melts into infinite azure" even as we look upon its fleecy loveliness, has only been dissipated into a more diffused, transparent form of substance. Matter, in other words, cannot be destroyed. It is a continuous phenomenon. As it vanishes in one form, it appears in another, and is thus conserved in unvarying amount from aeon to aeon!

A further extension of this law is seen in the great fact of the conservation of energy, or, as Herbert Spencer preferred to call it, "the persistence of force."¹ First discovered in 1842 by the famous Swabian physician, Dr. Robert Mayer—rediscovered five years later by the eminent physicist, Herman Helmholtz, who for the first time developed and applied it—taken over by John Tyndall as the fundamental law of nature, and received by Spencer as the basic principle of his Synthetic Philosophy—this law has been well described by John Fiske as "the deepest truth which analytic science can disclose." Its significance can best be understood, perhaps, by noting in due order the three stages of its discovery and application.

In the first place, it was discovered, or rather suspected in a vague sort of way, that the various kinds of energy in the world are not in reality so

¹ *First Principles*, page 194.

many different and isolated forces, as had been generally assumed without question, but only different manifestations of one fundamental force, which is best described simply as motion. Heat is not one separate phenomenon, light another, and magnetism still another; but heat, light, magnetism, and the rest, are all so many variants of one great power or energy, which is common to them all. "We now know," says Ernst Haeckel, affirming at this late date what was originally only suspected, "that heat, sound, light, chemical action, electricity, and magnetism, are all modes of motion."¹

This postulate was definitely established when, as a second stage in the revelation of this great law, it was discovered that one force can be changed or converted into another. Motion, when arrested, produces heat, electricity, magnetism, light, according to circumstances. Heat is continuously passing over into light and power. Magnetism's transformation into motion is the best evidence we have of its existence. More evident still are the metamorphoses of electricity. Into my room there runs the one slender wire from the electric power-house some miles away, and from this single source of energy I get the light by which I read by night, the heat by which I cook my morning meal, and the power by which I drive my vacuum cleaner. Each force, in other words, as might be shown by innumerable illus-

¹ See *The Riddle of the Universe*, page 231.

trations, is transferable, directly or indirectly, into every other force. To alter just a bit the familiar lines of Shakespeare—

All the world's a stage . . .
Each force in its time plays many parts.

Most important of all, however, is the last step in the demonstration of this law of the conservation of energy—namely, that in the transformation of one force into another, no particle of energy is lost in the process. "Accurate measurement of the quantity of force which is used in this metamorphosis," says Professor Haeckel, "shows that it is constant or unchanged."¹ Of course, when the transformation is artificial, as in some mechanical operation, and is done clumsily, or when the elements handled are such as to defy the rude instruments with which we have to work, a large amount of force very apparently disappears. But while we, as individual investigators or workers, may lose some of this energy, the universe does not. "No particle of living energy is ever extinguished."² Force, in other words, to quote the phrase of Spencer, persists. All energy is conserved. So true is this, that, as Haeckel puts it again, "The sum of force which is at work in infinite space and produces all phenomena is unchangeable."³ If we could gather together all the energy in the world and measure it from time to time, we should find

¹ See *The Riddle of the Universe*, page 213.

² *Ibid.*, page 213.

³ *Ibid.*, page 212.

it always absolutely the same. No matter what changes take place about us, the sum-total of force in the universe remains constant. Rivers may overflow their banks and seas run dry, storms may sweep the mountains and level the harvests of the plain, islands may be shattered by volcanic eruption and continents shaken by convulsive cataclysms, stars may waste to destruction and planets reel to pits of darkness, the earth may be removed and mountains be carried into the midst of the sea—still, in spite of all, does the cosmic energy suffer no curtailment. It is the same yesterday, today, and forever. In this, as in God, there “is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

Here, now, so far as matter and energy are concerned at least, is a basal law of existence. “Whatever *is*, both *was* and *shall be*,” to quote Sir Oliver Lodge;¹ whatever does not satisfy this condition must be regarded as some transient appearance merely, and not as a fundamental entity of the universe. As Professor Tait was always fond of putting it, “Persistence or conservation is the test or criterion of real existence.”²

But if this fact is true, then it follows necessarily that its converse must also be true—namely, that “real existence” must be always characterized by “persistence.” Which opens up at once the marvellous probability, if not reasonable certainty, that life or spirit, which we have already seen may

¹ See *Life and Matter*, page 89.

² Quoted in *Ibid.*, page 89.

be regarded as distinct an entity of the universe as either matter or energy, is likewise as persistent. There may be still a question as to whether life is a real existence by itself, or only one more form of energy. But if we accept the working hypothesis adopted by such thinkers as John Fiske, William James, William H. Thomson,¹ and expounded by Sir Oliver Lodge in his *Life and Matter*, that "life is not a form of energy . . . but belongs to a separate order of existence, which interacts with this material frame of things, and, while there, exerts guidance and control on the energy which already here exists,"² there can be no question whatsoever as to its persistence, or to use the theological term, immortality. To think of life, or spirit, as appearing and disappearing, coming into and going out of existence, is surely as irrational a thing today as to think of matter or energy acting in this same extraordinary fashion. We would ridicule for his ignorance or credulity a man who would believe in our day that the greater part of a

¹ See above Chapter I., pages 36-49.

² See further Lodge's interesting and persuasive analogy: "I see life animating matter for a time and then quitting it, just as I see dew appearing and disappearing on a plate. Apart from a solid surface, dew cannot exist as such, and to a savage it might seem to spring into and go out of existence; but we happen to know more about it: we know that it has a permanent and continuous existence in an imperceptible, intangible, suppressional form, though its visible manifestation in the form of mist or dew is temporary and evanescent. Perhaps it is permissible to trace in that elementary phenomenon some superficial analogy to an incarnation."—*Life and Matter*, pages 104-5.

log of wood has been annihilated by the action of the fire which consumes it, or that the heat of a molten metal, which disappears under the cooling action of air or water, has been eliminated from the universe. And why should we not similarly ridicule a man who would believe that that great spiritual force, which we call the soul, has come to its end with the death or dissolution of its physical vehicle, the body? Such a break in the line of continuity is unthinkable. What prevails throughout the great realm of matter and energy cannot surely fail in the greatest of all realms, the realm of spirit. The law of conservation, in other words, must hold here as well as everywhere else. The universe is still a unit, and its laws of universal application.

But this truth is not only established by the primary processes of scientific reasoning, but is impressively confirmed by the ordinary standards of common sense. Entirely apart from all matters of rational hypothesis and inference, is there any sane man who can believe that the complete cessation of a certain amount of energy in the material world is impossible, but that a similar cessation of a certain amount of energy in the spiritual world is not only possible but inevitable—that God has decreed that the physical force known as heat can never be annihilated, but that the spiritual force known as love not only can be but is annihilated with the coming of what we call death to this mortal flesh? If this is

actually the case, then may we not wisely ask ourselves what kind of a world we are inhabiting? What are we to think of a world which cannot tolerate the destruction of a single particle of light, or heat, or magnetism, and yet can cast away utterly the greatness and power of the human soul? What are we to think of a God who is so thrifty that he cannot spare a single ohm of electricity or pound of steam, and yet can regard with equanimity the incalculable loss of reason, affection, and consecrated purpose? The mind of a man or the heart of a woman would seem to be just as much a force as the dynamo of an electric battery or the boiler of a locomotive; and if the cosmic law cannot permit the annihilation of the one, it would surely seem as though it could not permit the annihilation of the other. Is it not madness to conceive of the reason, the conscience, the magnetism, the love, of man coming to an end at death, and a ray of light or a volt of electricity going on forever? Is it not madness to think of the imperial mind of Cæsar extinguished like a gutted candle, and his ashes still with us to "stop a hole to keep the wind away?" Even though the evidence which science gives us of the universal extension of the law of persistence were utterly destroyed, it would still be possible to affirm the law, as regards the spirit at least, on the basis of the moral reason. "Can we believe," says Dr. C. F. Dole, in his *The Hope of Immortality*, "that the noblest and holiest, the grand men of genius,

the leaders and helpers of mankind, have perished like so many cattle?" If so, he continues, "then we must translate all life into terms of final death."¹ The impossibility of such translation in the vast realm of physical energy has been demonstrated. That such translation is equally impossible in the realm of spiritual energy would seem to be evident. The law of persistence or conservation is but the physical equivalent of religion's abiding truth of the immortality of the soul.

V

Another aspect of this fundamental intimation of immortality from man's essential nature as a spiritual being, is seen in what we may call the argument from ethics. This is described by Professor William Adams Brown, in his *The Christian Hope*, as "the argument from the incompleteness of human life."

All about us [he says], we see in human nature undeveloped possibilities, beginnings that have no ending, prophecies that have no fulfilment. . . . We carry each one of us within ourselves a better self, a soul as yet unborn which is struggling toward the light. Is it never to come to its own?²

This argument assumes a peculiar cogency when

¹ See *The Hope of Immortality*, page 15.

² See *The Christian Hope*, page 187.

we survey the social conditions which have prevailed in this and every other age, and see how hideously and needlessly incomplete are the lives of men. The majority of mortals are born amid conditions which permit nothing better than a mere brute struggle for existence, and from these conditions it is only the rare individual who succeeds in making escape. Faced day after day with the terrific problem of getting food enough to keep body and soul together, of securing clothing enough to ward off death from sheer exposure, of maintaining some kind of a shelter which can be called a home, most men and women exercise nothing but their lowest animal functions, and from necessity leave those higher spiritual attributes, which alone distinguish them from the brutes, to atrophy and perish from disuse. Think of the millions who labour in our mines and mills, and live in our slums and factory villages; think of the wasting hordes of China and India, the slaves of Africa and the peons of Mexico, the peasants of Europe and the factory hands of England and America—and see how true is this assertion about the “undeveloped possibilities” of human nature. Most men never live at all *as men!* They simply exist and, when their time comes, die—with all the divine powers of their natures unfulfilled. The thought which came to Gray as he walked among the graves in the country churchyard must come to us all, as we ponder the unnumbered dead:

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid,
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire,
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre.

Some village Hampden that, with dauntless breast,
The little tyrant of his fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

But knowledge to their eyes her ample page
Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;
Chill penury repressed their noble rage,
And froze the genial currents of the soul.

What wonder that, as man has looked upon the waste and wreckage of human life, seen the havoc wrought by ignorance and poverty, counted the souls that have perished barren of spiritual blossom and fruit, he has cried out, with Professor Brown, is humanity "never to come to its own? . . . Is this really to be the end of all?"—and has found in the hope of immortality an answer to his cry!

From one point of view, of course, this argument is weakened by the consideration that the remedy for such an ill as this which we have just described is to be found not in some fulfilment that may be had in the life to come, but in the fulfilment that should be had in the life that now is. What we have here, perhaps, is an intimation not so much of immortality as of the cruelty and stupidity which in all ages have doomed the many to misery

for the sake of the favoured and prospered few. This is an argument not for patient waiting for the better life to come, but for such a reconstruction of our own social order that every child born into the world shall be given an equal chance with every other child to develop his latent possibilities and powers. It is a challenge not to trust in God for the ultimate rectifying of human mistakes and crimes, but to rise ourselves and smite the wrongs that are now turning the great masses of mankind to destruction. To find consolation for social iniquities in the assurance of immortality is to run the risk, pointed out by Charles W. Eliot, in his *Religion of the Future*, of "inducing men to be patient under sufferings or deprivations against which they should . . . incessantly struggle."¹ Human life must of course be saved from incompleteness, but the work of salvation must begin here and not there, today and not tomorrow, and must first of all be attempted by ourselves and not by God. "The advent of a just freedom for the masses of mankind," says Ex-president Eliot again, "has been delayed for centuries by just this effect of compensatory promises issued by churches." *Now* is the acceptable year of the Lord! *This* is holy ground! *We* are our brother's keeper! Break the fetters which bind, level the barriers which confine, destroy the poverty which destroys—and lo! we shall this hour see "all about us in human nature" developed and not undeveloped

¹ See American Unitarian Association edition, page 11.

possibilities, beginnings that have some end, and prophecies that reveal some fulfilment!

All this is true! And yet, however bright the promise of the future, it is also true that nothing can ultimately redeem this fact of life's incompleteness from utter horror but the assurance of a life to come. And just here is the intimation of immortality which is involved in this whole problem. Can anything be more terrible than the thought that they who starve and crush the bodies of men can also starve and crush their souls? Can anything be more intolerable than the idea that the helpless millions who have festered and died in the bonds of slavery, the haunts of poverty, and the bloody wastes of barbarism, have lost their one and only chance to fulfil the mental and spiritual capacities of their divine inheritance? Can anything be more irrational than the assertion that the human injustice which "loosened and let down the brutal jaw" of Markham's *Man with the Hoe*, "slanted back (his) brow," and "blew out the light within (his) brain," extinguished also that flicker of the soul, however faint and feeble, which made this creature a "man" after all, and not merely a "brother to the ox." Look back over all the long record of human misery!—see the dreams that have dawned only to go out in blackest night, the hopes that have grown up only to be cut down and wither, the ideals that have been born only to perish miserably, the lives that have been created and nourished only to be blasted in agony!

—consider all this, and then ask if it can be possible that there is no future life, no other chance, no ultimate resurrection from man's perpetual crucifixion! Such a condition is impossible! So sure as man was born at all, he was born into a universe which will not fail him. There must be for him an opportunity commensurate with his needs! There must be an eternal justice of the spirit which can retrieve the temporary injustice of the world! There must be a God who is more powerful than the Neros, the Torquemadas, and the *Anciens Régimes*. If not, the world is mad, life a curse, and the thought of God a mockery!

This ethical argument for immortality becomes even more convincing, strangely enough, when we turn from the lives which are incomplete, to those which may be regarded, from the spiritual point of view at least, as complete. What are we to say, for example, when we see some soul, which is well-nigh perfect in its grasp of reality, its range of sympathy, its love of all things good and beautiful, its consecration to the best and highest, suddenly cut off by some accident or disease, and its work untimely ended? What are we to say, that is, not when the life is incomplete, but when the task to which the life has set itself is uncompleted? And not for any cause for which the ordinary course of human events is responsible, but for some cause which is so far beyond the reach of human skill and power that it seems a very part of the cosmic order! Here is Captain Scott brought

to his sublime end by the accident of bad weather and an exhausted supply of food and fuel! Here is Phillips Brooks, stricken in the very prime of his noble career by a diphtheritic sore-throat. Here is Shelley, drowned in the unthinking sea when his song was sweetest and strongest, because of an unexpected squall of wind! No one of these lives was incomplete. Their possibilities had fulfilments—their beginnings, ends—their prophecies, glorious realizations! Had these men endured to a prolonged old age, not a single inch would have been added to their spiritual stature. For

We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths,
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.

We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.

What *is* incomplete is the work they might have done, the service they might have rendered! But it is this incompleteness, like the incompleteness of the life itself, which makes it inconceivable again that the souls of such as these could have perished with their mortal flesh. Is it possible that these spirits of ours are dependent for existence upon bodies which can be destroyed almost without warning by a fall of snow, a vagrant grain of dust, or a passing breeze upon the sea? Is it conceivable that the range of our spiritual endeavours is determined by the wearing powers of a stomach, or the chance deflection of a typhoid germ? Is it imaginable

that the murderer who kills the body can also kill the soul—that the brutal soldiers of Pilate not only pierced Jesus's hands and feet, and broke his limbs, but extinguished like a snuffed-out candle as well the divine spirit within his tortured breast? Do we set sail upon life's sea in so frail a craft? If so, we are the mere playthings of idle chance! Life is in truth a casting of the dice! The cry of St. Paul, "who shall deliver me from the body of this death," takes on a new and awful meaning!

Such a thought, however, when really faced, is seen to be impossible. It cannot be that soul and body are thus locked in an inseparable embrace. The completed life must, somehow, somewhere, go on with its uncompleted work. Just to behold some noble, "God-conquered" man or woman, robbed of the right to life and service by a broken limb, a failing organ, or a freak of weather, is to be convinced of immortality. Unanswerable is the query of Professor George Herbert Palmer, as he ponders the sudden passing of his distinguished wife, in all the radiant glory of her prime—"Though no regrets are proper for the manner of her death, who can contemplate the fact of it and not call the world irrational if out of deference to a few particles of disordered matter it excludes so fair a spirit?"¹

¹*The Life of Alice Freeman Palmer*, page 327. See also Richard Watson Gilder's poem on the same occasion:

"When fell today the word that she had gone,
Not this my thought: Here a bright journey ends,

Nor is even this the end! For no matter how perfect the spirit nor how many the years, life never seems to reach completion in this mortal sphere. We are never ready to have the great and the good, however long their span of days, decline and die. "Who dares speak the word completed," exclaims Prof. Hugo Münsterberg, "Do not our purposes grow? . . . Does not every newly created value give us the desire for further achievement? . . . Is our life ever so completely done that no desire has still a meaning?"¹ Surely if the pauper who has never had a chance, and the hero or prophet who is untimely lost, both point eternity to man, how much more even the aged saint, who moves serenely to his grave, as full of years as of honours! We can think of the extinction of Gladstone in his old age with as little equanimity as that of the younger Pitt in his youth. It seems as gross an injustice that Tennyson's lips of song should be permanently sealed at eighty-three, as Keats's at twenty-six. It is as intolerable that the cup of hemlock should end the venerable Socrates as that the cross should end the youthful Jesus. The old have themselves testified to this feeling in their own

Here rests a soul unresting; here, at last,
 Here ends the earnest struggle, that generous life—
 For all her life was giving. Rather this,
 I said (after the first swift, sorrowing pang)
 Radiant with love, and love's unending power,
 Hence, on a new quest, starts an eager spirit. . . ."

¹ See *The Eternal Life*, pages 67-69.

cases. Thus James Martineau is reported to have said, on his eightieth birthday, "How small a part of my plans have I been able to carry out! Nothing is so plain as that life at its fullest on earth is a fragment." And Victor Hugo, reviewing his career in his closing years, declared, "For half a century I have been writing my thoughts in prose and verse—history, philosophy, drama, romance, satire, ode, and song. I have tried all. But I feel that I have not said a thousandth part of what is in me." The highest and longest life, in other words, presents the same imperative for immortality as the lowest and shortest. From the spiritual standpoint, it is as far removed from the end, and thus as much entitled to a new beginning, as any other. "God's greatness," even as it "flows around" and proves "our incompleteness," proves also our very eternal continuance toward a completion. Our very mortality, in other words, is itself the assurance of our immortality, as the boundary of one realm is the border of the next. It was this argument which came nearest to convincing Browning's unbelieving Cleon—

. . . Every day my sense of joy
 Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
 By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen;
 While every day my hairs fall more and more,
 My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase
 The horror quickening still from year to year,
 The consummation coming past escape,
 When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy,—

When all my works wherein I prove my worth,
 Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,
 I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,
 The man who lived his life so over-much,
 Sleep in my urn. It is so horrible
 I dare at times imagine to my need
 Some future state. . . .

VI

We shall not behold, however, the clearest intimation of immortality that is involved in the spiritual nature of man until we have turned to the consideration of those larger aspects of personality which are to be found not in the individual himself but in that strange universe of ideas and ideals which this individual has created for his abode.

I refer here to the familiar fact, which has been at the heart of every idealistic philosophy from the *Dialogues* of Plato to the *Prolegomena* of T. H. Green, that this world in which we live has no permanent value or even meaning except as man has given it a value and meaning by the creative genius of his spirit. Consider the world with men eliminated from the scene! The same sun follows its pathway through the skies by day, and the same stars set their beacons in the darkness of the night. Clouds still sail through airy seas of blue, and lightnings flame like gleaming swords from out the ugly scabbards of the storm. Mountains still lift their heads on far horizons, rivers still run through gloomy jungles and sunny plains to watery oceans,

waves still sound their thunders on dripping crags. Birds sing, leaves rustle in the breeze, and insects chant the monotone of wayward flight. Living creatures are everywhere about us, eating, drinking, and bringing forth their kind. Island and sea, mountain and plain, day and night, sleeping and waking, birth and death—every material phenomenon and every vital action remain unchanged. And yet, with the absence of man is the absence as well of every meaning that the world has ever had! The skies mean as little to the eagle as the sea to the dolphin. The lion is indifferent to the lovely river from which he drinks, and the lumbering grizzly feels no stir within his heart as he looks upon the majestic mountain peak which is his habitation. Life moves on as it has ever moved; but beauty and ugliness, order and disorder, love and hate, right and wrong, progress and retrogression, beginning and end, have wholly disappeared. For it is man, and man alone, who gives meaning and value to the world. By the sheer power of his genius as a personality, he is the creature of a spiritual universe, not of the raw material of the physical universe, which has, and can have, no existence apart from him. It is his eye which makes the landscape beautiful, his ear which finds the singing cuckoo "but a wandering voice," his heart which sees "sermons in stones, books in the running brooks, and good in everything." It is his mind which discovers order in the day's succession of phenomena, sees progress in the

evolution of earthly life, and sets goals for the future attainment of humanity. It is his soul which transfigures physical passion into love, displaces brute force with "sweet reasonableness," and conceives the coming of a time when "the meek shall inherit the earth." Just so far as we see in the world something more than "a fortuitous concourse of atoms" or a mechanical succession of vital processes, we see what man's spirit has created and now maintains. Just so far as we find a rational meaning in the world, we find what man has put there. Just so far as we behold a standard of value, which makes some things useful and others worthless, we behold what man has set up for judgment and guidance. Truth, goodness, beauty—all these things upon which the worth of life so exclusively depends that we would gladly die, if need be, that they may be perpetuated and enlarged—these belong to man's spirit! Until he was, these were not; and if he shall ever cease to be, these also at that same moment shall pass away!

What this means, from the standpoint of the immortal hope, is manifest. For who can consider the creative contribution which man has made to the material universe without being convinced that his spirit is undying? It certainly would be a strangely irrational state of affairs if the being, whose mind and heart have put into the world all the truth, beauty, and goodness it contains, can pass away like "the grass which today is and to-

morrow is cast into the oven," while the evolving aggregate of indestructible matter and persistent energy sweeps on into endless life! To the man who can believe that the sculptor is less important than the clay which he models, that the painter has less of enduring reality within his dreaming soul than the pigments which he spreads upon his canvas, that Abt Vogler will become but a handful of worthless and nameless dust long before the organ which he awakened to matchless harmonies has crumbled to ruin, this idea may not seem quite utterly preposterous. But to those of us who believe that the whole is greater than any of its parts, that the doer is more significant than the thing done, that the spirit of man is infinitely more than "the dust of the ground" into which, like another Yahveh, he breathes "the breath of life," such a conception is impossible. If there can be any question of primacy between the worker and the work, the creator and the creation, the spirit and the *logos*, it is the former and not the latter which must be regarded as "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." "By reality," says Herbert Spencer, "we mean persistence in consciousness."¹ If this be true, then it follows that the world of matter and of force has no reality save as it persists in consciousness; and that consciousness must therefore itself persist as the condition of this reality. This means, in the last analysis, that if there is anything real

¹ See *First Principles*, page 163.

and persistent in the world it is consciousness! And this means in turn, if "logic is logic," that the spirit of man is immortal!

But suppose this line of reasoning be faulty, as it very well may be! Then are we not led into a worse state than ever? For if man "is soon gone," it follows, does it not, that all these meanings and values, which alone make the world significant and life worth living, are also "soon gone"? For this one thing is certain, as Dr. Dole points out impressively, "there is no such thing as justice, truth, or love in the abstract."¹ Justice exists only because men are just; truth is real only because men are true; love is "the greatest thing in the world" only because men love. These great conceptions of the spirit are as permanent as the soul of man, and no more! Which means that if man dies, then truth, goodness, beauty, faith, hope, love, the dreams of the old and the visions of the young, die as well! Our eternal values are not eternal but passing! The things which glorify nature and ennoble life are not realities but illusions! That mighty church of the spirit, so wonderfully described by Charles Rann Kennedy, in his *Servant in the House*, as made up of

the beating of human hearts, . . . the nameless music of men's souls, . . . the brawny trunks of heroes, . . . the faces of little children . . . the joined hands of comrades . . . the numberless

¹ See *The Hope of Immortality*, page 19.

musings of all the dreamers of the world, . . . the burden of unutterable anguish . . . and the tune of a great laughter.¹ . . .

is but a mirage of the desert! The realm of matter and force, of amoeba and protozoa, of bird and mammal, exists—but not the realm of poets, seers, prophets, heroes, and lovers!

This is possible, of course. Almost anything is possible! But to say that it is fundamentally irrational is to express it mildly. It is inconceivable that the vast realm of the spirit, which is the slow creation of children's laughter, women's tears, and men's labour, is doomed to pass "as a flood or as a watch in the night." Suppose, for example, that the world should suddenly enter the poison belt of A. Conan Doyle, or be visited by the comet of H. G. Wells, and all humanity be smitten in one fell instant! Would this mean that all the ideals of truth and standards of virtue which the race has won at so great a cost, through so many centuries of sacrificial endeavour, would at once be blotted from the universe? Nay, we do not have to imagine such a cataclysm as this to make our point. The dilemma is with us at this moment! For we know that, in a few aeons hence, this earth will become uninhabitable, and the last man lay himself down to die. And are we to believe that, when this moment comes, the frozen earth will still be keeping every atom intact and registering in its

¹ See Act II.

material every impact of force, but all the high values which made it once worth while to study its elements and forces—the human and spiritual values that men have been working out with their toil, their tears, their blood—will have utterly vanished? If so, then we are confronted with a strange and terrible paradox. Humanity, through all its aeons of existence, has been playing with shadows and chasing phantoms! What we call progress and enlightenment is but a fool's paradise! The men who have sought truth through all her devious paths, who have fought for freedom on bloody battle-fields, who have dreamed of beauty in lonely garrets and dark cellars, who have sacrificed money, friends, reputation, life itself for the cause of justice,—the saints and martyrs who for the faith that was in them, “had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonments” . . . these have been grossly deceived and have died pitifully in vain. And what is more—we ourselves are likewise deceived in hailing these men as the noblest of their kind, and trying to follow in their footsteps. Not Christ is the true leader but Caliban, who mused of God,

'Believeth with the life, the pain shall stop.
 His dam held different, that after death
 He both plagued enemies and feasted friends:
 Idly! He doth his worst in this our life,
 Giving just respite lest we die through pain,
 Saving last pain for worst, with which, *an end!*'¹

¹ See Browning's *Caliban on Setebos*.

But such a "hopeless confusion of all that we know about values," as Dr. Dole puts it, marks "the height of the ridiculous." "Our intelligence reacts from such a doctrine."¹ If we know anything at all, we know that truth is real, that beauty is a fact, that faith, hope, and love abide! Which means that the soul of man, which first gave life to these ideals and in which alone they live and move and have their being from age to age, is immortal!

Nowhere is the great idea of man as the creator of eternal values, and hence himself eternal, expressed more beautifully than in Plato.

Tell me then [says Socrates in the *Phaedo*], what is that the inherence of which renders the body alive?

The soul [Cebes replied].

And is this always the case?

Yes, he said, of course.

Then whatever the soul possesses, to that she comes bearing life?

Yes, certainly.

And is there any opposite to life?

There is, he said.

And what is that?

Death.

And will the soul . . . ever receive the opposite of what she brings?

Impossible, replied Cebes. . . .

Then the soul is immortal?

Yes, he said.

¹ See *The Hope of Immortality*, page 18.

And may we say that this has been proven?

Yes, abundantly proven, Socrates, [he replied].¹

VII

All this is wonderfully convincing to any one who has even a glimmering sense of what the values of life really mean, and of how these values are only experienced in and through persons. There is one possibility involved in this argument, however, which has not been mentioned as yet, but which, if recognized, would vitiate all that we have been saying. I refer to the fact that, while it is true that only through the continuance of personality can we have any guarantee of the continuance of those things which alone give meaning and value to the world, it is also true, that the spirit of God can just as well give this guarantee as the soul of man. If humanity, in other words, should suddenly cease to be, God would still live, and in him would the values of life find the condition of their reality.

In this sense [says Professor William Adams Brown, interpreting this point of view in *The Christian Hope*], idealism is quite compatible with the denial of individual immortality. All that is necessary is that spiritual values should persist, and this is sufficiently conserved if . . . we believe in the Absolute Spirit in whose infinite experience all values are embraced and persist.²

¹ See *Dialogues*, trans. by Jowett, vol. ii., page 253.

² See *The Christian Hope*, page 183.

It is this consideration, strange as it may seem, which introduces us to the last and highest intimation which the nature of man can give us of the reality of the immortal hope. I refer to the fact that the spiritual aspects of human life cannot be explained save as they are interpreted in the light of their source and end in God; and that this explanation involves the principle of man's eternity with God. Undoubtedly this may be taken to mean, as many a mystic has declared, that "we are but transient modes of the Infinite spirit, temporary vehicles through which, for his own purposes, he expresses a part of his meaning"; and that "when we have served our day, our place will be taken by other modes, who will serve the divine purposes as well as we."¹ But it is much more rational, to my mind, to contend not that man is a material form or mode, in which the Absolute temporarily expresses its life, but that man is the spiritual offspring of God, and thus the sharer with him of eternity. The distinction here is frankly between the philosophical conception of God as Absolute Being and man as a mere emanation thereof, and the religious conception of God as a Father and man as his child. If God and man are mere spiritual abstractions, then indeed may man be but a vessel into which a portion of the infinite is temporarily conveyed. But if God and man are persons, then is man the child of God, and if a child, then an heir, heir of God and joint heir with Christ of life eternal!

¹ *The Christian Hope*, page 183.

Just here is the final argument for the immortal hope—the argument from religion! If we do not accept the religious interpretation of the universe, if we are content to agree with Haeckel and his fellow-materialists that the world is a great mechanism which finds its all-sufficient explanation in the ceaseless interaction between matter and force, if we can see in man nothing more than the highest form of animal where mental and spiritual life is only a kind of secretion of the brain as bile is a secretion of the liver, why then we can easily get along without the conception of immortality. But if we believe that religion is “an everlasting reality,” that God is the ultimate source of the world and man the highest expression of his divine life, that the forms and ceremonies, prayers and praises of religions the world around represent genuine, although faltering, endeavours of man to get into relation with that divine spirit “in which he lives and moves and has his being,” then we must accept the immortal hope as involved in the very warp and woof of this spiritual interpretation of the whole. It is just here that Jesus made his great contribution to this field of thought. He spoke little of the life to come, if we may trust the Synoptic record. A student will search *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke* in vain for any arguments in substantiation of the doctrine of immortality. Direct testimony is conspicuous in his teaching by its absence. What Jesus did was to elevate the whole conception of humanity. He gave such

dignity and worth to human nature that the thought of its endless continuance became natural. He disclosed capacities and powers within the human heart which inevitably suggested things infinite and eternal. He brought man, in other words, into immediate kinship with God, and thus gave so clear a revelation of man as the child of God, that it became forthwith as necessary to think of the eternity of the one as of the other. With him and through him, the idea of immortality became identical with the idea of God. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."¹

VIII

Here, now, are what I have ventured to call the intimations of immortality! They are all to be found in the nature of man as a moral being, an inhabitant of a realm spiritual and not material, a child of God and not a creature of earth! All this long chapter may be summed up in the ancient *confessio fidei* of Cicero:

When I consider the faculties with which the human soul is endowed—its amazing celerity, its wonderful power of recollecting past events, and its sagacity in discerning the future, together with its numberless discoveries in the arts and sciences—I feel a conscious conviction that this active comprehensive principle cannot possibly be of a mortal nature.²

¹ See *Matthew* xxii : 32.

² Quoted in Savage's *Minister's Handbook*, page 62.

“What a piece of work is man!” says Hamlet. “How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!” Such a spirit may be a mere “quintessence of dust.” But is it likely?

CHAPTER IV

IMMORTALITY AND EVOLUTION

With respect to immortality nothing shows me how strong and almost instinctive a belief it is, as the consideration of the view now held by most physicists, namely, that the sun with all the planets will in time grow too cold for life. . . . Believing as I do that man in the distant future will be a far more perfect creature than he now is, it is an intolerable thought that he and all other sentient beings are doomed to complete annihilation after such long-continued slow progress.—Charles Darwin, in *Life and Letters*, volume i., page 282.

TO any one who is familiar with philosophical and religious thought, it is obvious that there is nothing particularly new in the arguments for the doctrine of eternal life adduced and interpreted in the last chapter. These intimations of immortality contained within his own nature, man recognized comparatively early in his career; and they have formed the substance of his thought upon this question from the time of Plato and Aristotle down to the present age. If they are stated somewhat differently today than formerly, it is only because the widely expanding knowledge of our epoch has given us new facts, novel points of view, unexpected confirmations, and a strange

terminology. In essence, however, these arguments are none other than those which have satisfied the minds and consoled the hearts of men from the beginning.

I

A new era in this, as in every other field of thought, however, was opened up by the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 and the establishment therewith of the world-shaking doctrine of evolution. This event marks a crisis in the development of human knowledge and speculation which may safely be described as unexampled in the history of mankind.

Whatever may be the ultimate verdict of posterity upon this or that opinion which Mr. Darwin has propounded [said Professor Huxley, as President of the Royal Society], . . . the broad fact remains that, since the publication, and by reason of the publication of *The Origin of Species*, the fundamental conceptions of living nature have been completely changed.

And referring to the famous remark of Archimedes about the lever, he continued, "*The Origin of Species* proved itself to be the fixed point which the general doctrine of evolution needed in order to move the world."¹ The fact of the matter is, not merely the field of natural science, but the

¹ Address, *The Darwin Memorial*, June 9, 1885. See *Darwiniana*, page 249.

whole field of human thought, was transformed by this great book. The forms which we employ today are different forms, the universe upon which we look is a different universe, the individual and social ideals which we seek are different ideals, the lives which we live are different lives, because *The Origin of Species* was written and given to the world. In the light of the facts observed and the conclusions formulated by this one supreme investigator and thinker, all knowledge had to be cast into the melting-pot of the new evolutionary point of view. Every idea had to be reconsidered from the very beginning. And the idea of immortality was no exception to the rule!

II

The connection between the immortal hope and this great doctrine of evolution becomes apparent when we see that not least impressive of the consequences which followed upon the discoveries of the great scientist of Down was what he himself forecasted, in the last chapter of his epoch-making book, as the possibility that "light (would) be thrown on the origin of man and his history"—a speculation amply confirmed by Huxley, when he published his treatise on *Man's Place in Nature*, and still later by Darwin himself in his monumental work, *The Descent of Man*! In all previous ages of human thought, man had been almost universally regarded as an entirely distinct and

isolated specimen of the divine handiwork. All species of life, to be sure, were regarded as having had their origin in certain special acts of creation. But man was a being very particularly apart from every other form of existence. He was not in any sense "a living creature"; on the contrary, he was none other than "a living soul." He was "made in God's own image," and breathed in his nostrils the breath of God's own life. When the classic chapters of *Genesis* describe man as having "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth," they set forth the only relation which humanity was ever conceived as having to the lower world of animal life.

All this was immediately transformed, however, by the theory of the origin of species by the process of natural selection through the struggle for survival. The "light" which Darwin presumed from the very first that his doctrine would throw "upon the origin of man and his history," revealed that man is not an arbitrary and separate creation of God at all, but, like the fish and the reptile, the bird and the monkey, only one of the many links in the apparently endless chain of unfolding life. Here at the beginning of things—if such a beginning may be postulated for the sake of argument—was only a flaming ball of fire, cast off in some moment of awful convulsion by the rolling sun. Slowly this planet cooled, shaped itself into the globe which

we now see, and at last, in the fullness of time, gave birth to the first faint and almost imperceptible manifestations of earthly life. Slowly, age by age, these forms of life evolved, unfolding into ever higher and more complex types of existences—plants, fishes, reptiles, birds, mammals, primates; until finally, in some distant epoch forever engulfed in the darkness of aeons unknown, man came upon the scene. He was not created arbitrarily by any divine hand. He was not conceived and superimposed upon the evolving process by external power. He was not something accidental, or even miraculous. He was simply the next step in the development of earthly life. Not more naturally did the reptile spring from the fish, the bird from the reptile, or the mammal from the bird, than man, in his turn and at his appointed hour, sprang directly from the mammal. If man differed in any way from what had preceded him, it was a difference inherent not in himself, as a separate created being, but in the place which he occupied in the mounting scale of existence as the latest and therefore necessarily the most wonderful manifestation of all. At bottom, however, he was like every other living creature—not something unique, but an integral “part” of “one stupendous whole.”

In the beginning, of course, this description of man's place in nature was little more than a postulate, very tentatively put forward by the early evolutionists, who were at this time more con-

cerned with earth-worms and pigeons than with men and women. With surprising rapidity, however, facts began to multiply in support of this theory; and these facts have today become so infinite in number and so incontestable in character that we no longer hesitate to include man in the cosmic process of evolution. Darwin himself, the most cautious of men, dared to assert this fact as early as 1872.

The main conclusion here arrived at [he says in his *The Descent of Man*], . . . is that man is descended from some less highly organized form. The grounds upon which this conclusion rests will never be shaken, for the close similarity between man and the lower animals in embryonic development, as well as in innumerable points of structure and constitution . . . are facts which cannot be disputed It is incredible that these facts should speak falsely. . . . The close resemblance of the embryo of man to that, for instance, of a dog—the construction of his skull, limbs and whole frame on the same plane with that of other mammals—the occasional reappearance of various structures . . . which man does not normally possess, but which are common to the Quadrumana—and a crowd of analogous facts—all point in the plainest manner to the conclusion that man is the codescendant with other mammals of a common progenitor.¹

And this dictum, thus laid down by the great

¹ See *The Descent of Man*, pages 620–21.

pioneer, has been consistently affirmed by all who have followed in his footsteps.

This much is certain [say Professors Jordan and Kellogg, in their book on *Evolution and Animal Life*], man's place is in nature. . . . Man is like the other species, an inhabitant of the earth, a product of the laws of life: his characters are phases in the long process of change and adaptation to which all organisms are subject. . . . The common heredity of man with other animals is as well established as any fact can be.¹

And John Fiske states the same thing with even greater emphasis, when he says, in *The Destiny of Man*:

As we examine the records of past life upon our globe, and study the mutual relations of the living things that still remain, it appears that the higher forms of life including man himself, are all the modified descendants of lower forms. Zoologically speaking, man can no longer be regarded as a creature apart by himself. We cannot erect an order on purpose to contain him, as Cuvier tried to do. Man is not only a vertebrate, a mammal, and a primate, but he belongs as a genus to the catarrhic family of apes. Such is the conclusion to which the scientific world has come within a quarter of a century of Mr. Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and there is no more reason for supposing that this conclusion will ever be gainsaid than for supposing that the Copernican astronomy will sometime be over-

¹ See *Evolution and Animal Life*, page 467.

thrown and the concentric spheres of Dante's heaven reinstated in the minds of men.¹

III

“He who believes in the advancement of man from some low organized form, will naturally ask how does this bear on the belief in the immortality of the soul,” writes Charles Darwin, in the closing pages of his *The Descent of Man*,² without himself venturing an answer to this inquiry. Others, however, were not so modest. Almost immediately it was declared, and with apparent good reason, that this linking of man with the unfolding processes of nature destroyed once for all every hope that the human mind had ever conceived of its own immortality. So long as it was possible to regard man as a being peculiarly made “in the image of God,” it was possible, if not inevitable, to think of him also as “of the same substance with the Father” and therefore eternal. Hence the exclamation of the Psalmist, “What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels and crowned him with glory and honor”—and immortality! But now all this was changed. Man was not made “a little lower than the angels,” but, on the contrary, only a little higher than the brute creatures of the jungle! If the doctrine of evolution meant

¹ See *The Destiny of Man*, page 19.

² See page 627.

anything at all, it surely meant that man was an integral part of the animal creation, and as such an intimate sharer of all the limitations as well as the powers of animal existence. At one stroke man was snatched down from his high estate in heaven, and hurled into the ooze and slime of the primeval origin of things terrestrial. The birds and beasts are his forbears; the higher apes his nearer relatives! All of which means that he has no more chance of an immortal destiny than any other living thing beneath the sun! It is this view originally formed in the early Darwinian days as a result of the demonstration of the origin of man from below rather than from above, which Professor Ernst Haeckel lays down with conviction in his *Riddle of the Universe*, which was published as late as 1899.

If the human soul were to live for all eternity [he says, in the famous eleventh chapter entitled *The Immortality of the Soul*], we should have to grant the same privilege to the . . . higher animals, at least to those of the nearest related mammals (apes, dogs, etc.). For man is not distinguished from them by a special *kind* of soul, or by any peculiar and exclusive psychic function, but only by a higher *degree* of psychic activity, a superior stage of development. In particular, consciousness—the function of the association of ideas, thought, and reason—has reached a higher level in many men (by no means in all) than in most of the animals. Yet this difference is far from being so great as is popularly supposed, and it is much

slighter in every respect than the corresponding difference between the higher and lower animal souls, or even the difference between the highest and the lowest stages of the human soul itself. If we ascribe 'personal immortality' to man, we are bound to grant it also to the higher animals.¹

Such an extension of the immortal hope, however, is not, in Haeckel's view, possible. Man and the animal are one in origin and essential character, to be sure; but this must mean not that the animal is immortal with man, but rather that man is mortal with the animal.²

If we take a comprehensive glance [he says], at all that modern anthropology, psychology, and cosmology teach with regard to athanasia (immortality), we are forced to this definite conclusion, The belief in the immortality of the human soul is a dogma which is in hopeless contradiction with the most solid empirical truths of modern science,³

an affirmation which Haeckel takes pains to reiterate in his *The Wonders of Life*, as though to prove that the chorus of protest evoked by his earlier

¹ See *The Riddle of the Universe*, page 201.

² It may be well to note that not all persons have found the thought of the immortality of animals—certain ones, at least!—inconceivable or even unpleasant. Witness the statement of John Galsworthy in reference to dogs! "If we have spirits, they have. If we know after our departure who we are, they do. No one, I think, who really longs for the truth can ever glibly say which it will be for dog and man—persistence or extinction of consciousness."

³ See *The Riddle of the Universe*, page 210.

book could not alter the irrefragable conclusions of scientific investigation!¹

All this sounds rather ancient in this day and generation. For within a couple of decades after the first publication of Darwin's discovery and the assertion of its fatal consequences to the immortal hope, a decided change began to come over the situation. It began to be doubted very seriously if it was altogether certain that man was so inextricably bound up with the material creation, from which he had undoubtedly proceeded, that its doom was at the same time and for the same reasons his own. Man is at one with the brutes that die on the physical side without any question. But what about the mental and spiritual side? Is man here also identical with his forbears, or does he possess certain distinctive attributes which seem to mark him off as something decidedly different? What about his self-consciousness, his faculties of reason, his association of ideas? What about his memory, his moral idealism, his loyalties of personal affection and social consecration? What about those

August anticipations, symbols, types,
Of a divine splendour ever on before
In that eternal circle life pursues,

of which Browning speaks so impressively? What about those phenomena revealed by William

¹ See *The Wonders of Life*, page 64.

Wordsworth, and shared in to some degree or other by all who think and brood and love:

. . . those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving about in worlds not realized,
High instincts before which our mortal nature
(Doth) tremble like a guilty thing surprised;
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet the master light of all our seeing.

Do these realities have any counterpart in the animal realm? Is man here like or unlike the creatures who preceded him? Is it not certain that in such phenomena we see the attributes of a new creation, the evolution of a new form of life, the dawn of a new and greater day than ever has greeted hitherto the horizon of the world? Certainly the differences here specified far surpass in significance any identities of physical structure and constitution. At first, I doubt not, man could not have been distinguished from the other creatures from the loins of which he had sprung and from the midst of which he was just beginning to emerge. But something there was within him, which contained within itself the possibility of endless development beyond and above anything that had ever

been known before. It was this which made man even at this early moment something different from the brutes about him; which persuaded him to turn aside from all paths that had been followed heretofore, and make a new one for his own feet; which made him stand erect and look upward to the stars and dream of gods; which made him think, and then utter his thoughts in speech, and finally record his speech in writing; which made him in short, to be a man, however barbarous, and thus started him upon that march of progress which has led him onward and upward to the heights upon which he stands at the present day. A marvellous step was this when the first man was born. Surely it must have been at this glorious moment in the past that "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy!"

IV

Now just here, in this great principle of

Not like to like, but like in difference,

do we have the answer to the Haeckelian contention that, because man is physically the product of the animal creation, therefore he must die like any brute of the field, or else this brute must itself be endowed with immortality. Sure as is "man's place in nature," equally sure is his distinction from other living things. And this distinction, it is to be carefully noted, resides in that very realm

of things spiritual wherein the gift of eternal life must appear, if it is anywhere to be found! Man's physical descent from the animals does not in any sense involve the sacrifice of his spiritual endowments, and his consequent immortality. On the contrary, this physical descent only serves to emphasize and exalt these endowments. Somewhere in that long process of organic development from a microscopic spherule of living protoplasm on the one hand to "Plato's brain and the good Christ's heart" upon the other, the spirit of eternal life entered into the creature, and he became upon that instant "a living soul." Just how or when this metamorphosis took place, it is probably impossible to determine. Nor is the unveiling of this mystery essential to the demonstration of the fact.

Few persons [says Darwin], feel any anxiety from the impossibility of determining at what previous period in the development of the individual, from the first trace of a minute germinal vesicle, man becomes an immortal being; and there is no greater cause for anxiety because the period cannot possibly be determined in the gradually ascending organic scale. ¹

And yet explanations of this step of the evolutionary process have not been wanting. And in order that the absence of explanation may not be interpreted as failure of explanation, I venture to out-

¹ See *The Descent of Man*, page 627.

line at this point two of the most typical—both, it should be noted, the theories of men who must be numbered among the most distinguished scientists of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

First, there is the doctrine set forth by Joseph Le Conte, for many years professor of geology and natural history at the University of California, in his famous book on *Evolution and Its Relation to Religious Thought*.¹

I believe [he said, summing up his ideas upon this question], that the spirit of man was developed out of the *anima* or conscious principle of animals, and that this, again, was developed out of the lower forms of life-force, and this in its turn out of the chemical and physical forces of Nature; and that at a certain stage in this gradual development, viz. with man, it acquired the property of immortality precisely as it now, in the individual history of each man at a certain stage, acquires the capacity of abstract thought.

In elucidation of this view, Le Conte traces the evolution of organic life through its various stages, and shows how each step of advancement is marked by the sudden appearance of new powers and properties, never apparent and wholly unimaginable before. "There was a time in the history of the earth," he reminds us, "when only physical forces existed." At a certain stage in the process of development, however, "chemical affinity came

¹ For what follows see pages 313-30.

into being"—a new form of force never seen before, having new and peculiar phenomena, "though doubtless derived from the preceding." Ages passed away, and then suddenly, when conditions were favourable, life appeared—"a new and higher form of force, producing a still more peculiar group of phenomena, but still derived from the preceding."

Ages upon ages again passed away [he continues], during which this life-force took on higher and higher forms, . . . until finally when the time was fully ripe and conditions were exceptionally favourable, spirit, self-conscious, self-determining, rational, and moral, appeared—a new and still higher form of force, but still, as I am persuaded, derived from the preceding.

Thus has life gone on developing from stage to stage, each decisive onward step distinguished by the sudden appearance of new properties and powers, all of them derivative to be sure, but no one of them foreseen or even foreseeable. This whole process, says Professor Le Conte, interpreted in ultimate terms, is nothing but the gradual evolution "of spirit in the womb of Nature."

The universal Divine energy, unindividuated, diffused, is what we call physical and chemical force. The same energy in higher form, itself individuated, but only yet very imperfectly, is what we call the life-force of plants. The same energy, more fully individuated, but not completely, we call the *anima* of

animals. The *anima*, or animal soul, as time went on, was individuated more and more, until it resembled and foreshadowed the spirit of man. Finally, still the same energy, completely individuated as a separate entity and therefore self-conscious, capable of separate existence and therefore immortal, we call the spirit of man.

In man, in other words, the omnipresent Divine energy, after unnumbered centuries of what may be called embryonic development, at last came to birth, and the new and distinctive property or power which it assumed, at this marvellous instant of final realization, was immortality. "As the organic embryo at birth reaches independent material or temporal life," says Le Conte, "even so spirit embryo by birth attains independent spiritual or eternal life!"¹

A wholly different interpretation of this same fact is given us by Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace, co-discoverer with Charles Darwin of the great biological principle of natural selection.² Le Conte, as we have seen, is very emphatic in his belief that immortality is an attribute which has grown out of something already existing in earlier and lower forms of organic, and perhaps inorganic,

¹ "I can see no insuperable difficulty in the notion that, at some period of the evolution of humanity, this divine spark may have acquired sufficient concentration and steadiness to survive the wreck of material forms and endure forever."—John Fiske. See *The Destiny of Man*, page 117.

² For what follows on this point see *Darwinism*, pages 461-78.

life. Wallace, on the other hand, is equally emphatic in his opinion that the immortal spirit is a "new thing added at once, out of hand, to what was already existing before." It is somewhat difficult to get hold of his exact idea in all of its ramifications, but his basic conception seems to be that of "a world of spirit, to which the world of matter is altogether subordinate." Sure evidence of the reality of such a world as this, he finds in the existence in man of certain strange faculties, such as the mathematical, the musical, and the artistic, the origin and development of which cannot be explained on the basis of anything that is known in the material realm. .

These faculties [he says], either do not exist at all or exist in a very rudimentary condition in savages, but appear almost suddenly and in perfect development in the higher races. These same faculties are further distinguished by their sporadic character, being well developed only in a very small proportion of the community; and by the enormous amount of variation in their development. . . . Each of these characteristics is totally inconsistent with any action of the law of natural selection in the production of the faculties referred to; and the facts taken in their entirety, compel us to recognize some origin for them wholly distinct from that which has served to account for the animal characteristics of man.¹

And this origin he finds in what he calls "the unseen universe of Spirit."²

¹ See *Darwinism*, page 473.

² *Ibid.*, page 478.

Man, on this hypothesis, is a twofold creature. Superimposed upon his animal nature is a spiritual nature, which represents what Wallace calls, in his book entitled *Social Environment and Moral Progress*, "an influx of some portion of the spirit of the Deity."¹ By virtue of this "influx," man became a living soul. On the basis of this "influx," are to be explained all the attributes and powers of man which differentiate him from the brute.

On the hypothesis of this spiritual nature [says Wallace], are we able to understand much that is mysterious or unintelligible in regard to him, especially the enormous influence of ideas, principles and beliefs over his whole life and actions. Thus alone we can understand the constancy of the martyr, the unselfishness of the philanthropist, the devotion of the patriot, the enthusiasm of the artist, and the resolute and persevering search of the scientific worker after nature's secrets. Thus we may perceive that the love of truth, the delight in beauty, the passion for justice, and the thrill of exultation with which we hear of any act of courageous self-sacrifice, are the workings within us of a higher nature, which has not been developed by means of the struggle for material existence.²

Just how or when the influx of spiritual life enters into the unfolding material world, Wallace does not explain. He simply asserts his belief, for the

¹ See *Social Environment and Moral Progress*, page 102.

² See *Darwinism*, page 474.

reason stated, that man, in contradistinction to all other creatures, is a spirit. His true life is not in this world at all, but in that spiritual realm, whence flows the stream of his conscious life. His essential and distinctive being is not earthly but heavenly, not corruptible but incorruptible—and therefore not mortal but immortal!¹ “The whole purpose, the only *raison d’être*, of the world,” says this great thinker in conclusion, “is the development of spiritual beings, capable of indefinite life and perfectibility.”²

V

Here, now, are very definite answers to the contention of Haeckel and his fellow-materialists that the placing of man within the cosmic process involves the negation of his immortality. Whether we accept Le Conte’s theory of the inward flowering of the soul, or Wallace’s theory of the influx of the spirit from without, the conception of eternity is equally consistent with the doctrine of man’s evolutionary origin. Man’s union with nature, in other words, so far from being necessarily fatal to the immortal hope, seems only to emphasize the significance of those spiritual faculties of his being, in which the immortal hope finds its deepest and surest foundations.

Not yet, however, have we touched upon that

¹ Very similar to this theory of Wallace in idea, although not in the form of its statement, is the doctrine set forth by Sir Oliver Lodge in his *Life and Matter*.

² See *Darwinism*, page 477.

phase of the evolutionary conception which constitutes the real contribution of the new science of our time to the hope of immortality. We shall only begin to understand the significance of this contribution when we see that in this, as in every other problem of man's being, the issue is at once shifted by the doctrine of evolution from the idea of man as a separate individual to that of man as a part of the entire cosmic order. Not man in himself, but man in his relation to the all-embracing world of life, now becomes the almost exclusive point of view from which the problem of eternity presents itself. At the heart of the whole matter is the universe, and not merely an individual, or group of individuals, within this universe. If immortality is ever to be established at all, it must henceforth be upon the basis not of the peculiar powers and purposes resident within the human soul as a separate spiritual entity, but of the whole significance of that stupendous evolutionary process, of which the development of the soul is but a single incident. Not the argument from man, but the argument from the cosmos, must be now the deciding factor!

Looked at from this point of view, man takes on at once an altogether remarkable significance as an organic being. Here in this universe, evolution tells us, a great energy or spirit—self-existent, eternal, infinite, conscious, intelligent, purposeful—has been living through unnumbered aeons of time, and manifesting itself in ever higher and nobler

forms of created life. These manifestations have always been controlled by the unvarying law of development—movement, that is, from the lower to the higher, from the simple to the complex, “from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous,” to quote the familiar generalization of Herbert Spencer. Manifesting itself first as a mere particle of protoplasm, in unicellular form, it has grown and expanded, has moved step by step, ever upward and onward, from the inorganic to the organic, from the vegetable to the animal, from the invertebrate to the vertebrate, from the fish and bird to the mammal and primate, until at last, after millions of centuries of time, man has appeared—and with him the process has apparently stopped! No higher type of life has been evolved, nor is there any indication that such a type will ever appear. Progress still continues, of course, but it is no longer physical, but mental and spiritual, and, as such, is within man, and not beyond him. Says John Fiske:

On earth there will never be a higher creature than man . . . for man is still the goal toward which nature tended from the beginning. . . . He who has mastered the Darwinian theory sees that in the deadly struggle for existence, which has raged through countless aeons of time, the whole creation has been groaning and travailing together in order to bring forth the last consummate specimen of God’s handiwork—the human soul.¹

¹ See *The Destiny of Man*, pages 31–32.

And George Eliot puts the same great conclusion into poetic phrase, when she says:

I, too, rest in faith
That man's perfection is the crowning flower,
Toward which the urgent sap in life's great tree
Is pressing—seen in puny blossom now,
But in the world's great morrow to expand
With broadest petals and with deepest glow.

Now if this exaltation of man means anything at all, it means that a steady purpose has been rising through all the innumerable changing forms of life, and that man is the fulfilment of this purpose. It means that man is the end of all things, the goal toward which nature has been tending from the beginning, the "one far-off divine event, toward which the whole creation" has ever moved. It means that all which has preceded him has been but the preparation for his coming—that all the aeons of creative time have been fashioning the globe only that it might become his fitting habitation—that all plants and trees have flourished, all fishes swum the sea, all birds coursed through the air, all animals struggled and fought for supremacy in life's battle, only that man might be the perfect creature, physical, mental, spiritual, that we see him at the present moment. "So far from degrading humanity," says John Fiske, "the doctrine of evolution enlarges ten-fold the significance of human life and places it upon an even loftier eminence" than even priests and prophets

have imagined.¹ It makes man "the heir of all the ages," the inheritor of all the strength and power and beauty of the entire cosmic process. It ennobles him as the quintessence of all the life of all the world, the embodiment of everything that has gone before, the fulfilment and revelation of the universe. It gives him a kinship with all things that be, and thus endows him with a universal ancestry. Lowell boasts that he can count the trees "among his far progenitors"; Shelley addresses the skylark, Bryant the waterfowl, and Burns the field-mouse, as kindred spirits; Wordsworth feels in nature

. . . a presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused.
Therefore . . . [he continues], am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods
And mountains.

And now we find, according to evolution, that these fantastic visions of the poets are sober truth. The whole universe, with its myriad forms of life, has joined together for the making of the human soul—we are what we are, in thought and emotion, in ideal and aspiration, in the mind that thinks and the heart that feels and the soul that dreams its dreams and sees its visions, because we have grown, little by little, step by step, part by part, in and through and out of all that has gone

¹ See *The Destiny of Man*, page 25.

before. "No poet's fancy," says Mr. J. T. Sunderland in *The Spark in the Clod*, "ever dreamed such exaltation for man as science in our day, in the light of evolution, is declaring to be verified fact."¹

From the first, faint glimmerings of life, then, all things have been working toward this one mighty goal—the production of man, with his art and poetry and music, his cities and kingdoms, his civilizations and religions. And now arises instantly the fateful question, inevitable in the circumstances—what does all this mean? Has all this been done for nothing? Is all this ceaseless toil of the ages to no permanent end? Has all this "groaning and travailing" of the whole creation for millions upon millions of centuries past brought forth nothing but this transient creature man, who lives his few brief days upon the earth and then vanishes forever, like Prospero's "unsubstantial pageant," leaving "not a rack behind"? The material body of man is, as we know, cast aside and returns unto the dust from which it came. Astronomers tell us that that dreadful day is sure to come when the earth shall at last be swallowed up by the sun, the solar system be shattered to ruin, the heavens themselves vanish "like a flaming scroll," and all the material universe again be merged into the original fire-mist from which it first evolved. And now, in the face of this stupendous cataclysm, there comes the question, does this utter dissolution of gross matter involve also

¹ See *The Spark in the Clod*, page 51.

the dissolution of the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual nature of man? Does man's soul, in other words—this soul which is the supreme goal toward which all the creative energy has been ever moving—perish even as the dust of the earth? Has all this work of untold centuries, of millions upon millions of years of time, been done for nothing? Has chaos been reduced to order, this order fashioned into the "matchless architecture of the heavens and the earth," this structure clothed upon with life, this life unfolded into the wonder of flower and tree, the beauty of fish and bird, the miracle of man with his erect posture, his speaking tongue, his dreaming mind, his loving heart, his aspiring soul—that this last great miracle may continue only through life's little span and then cease forevermore?

Is it all ephemeral [asks John Fiske, as he surveys the majestic and splendid evolution of the world to its supreme achievement, the human soul], is it all a bubble that bursts, a vision that fades? Are we to regard the Creator's work as like that of a child, who builds houses out of blocks, just for the pleasure of knocking them down?¹

Such a conclusion as this, in the light of human reason, is impossible. It is mere madness to conceive of such a useless ending of the world—such a vain and empty outcome of the cosmic process. Just to assert that the universe has been

¹ See *The Destiny of Man*, page 114.

labouring for a million years to no permanent end, is to confess to lunacy. What, for instance, would we think of a painter who should spend a lifetime upon some great canvas—toiling through weary days and sleepless nights upon a masterpiece of creative workmanship—only to display it for a single day to an admiring world and then to slash it into bits? What would we think of a musician who should devote his years to the composition of a great opera, that sounded the deepest depths and smote the loftiest heights of inspired song—only to produce it for a single night and then destroy it forever? What would we think of an inspired poet, who should labour from youth to old age upon some great epic, which ran the whole gamut of human passion and scaled the farthest peaks of human idealism—only to read his noble lines to the listening ears of men for one little day, and then to give his manuscript to the flames? And what, in the same way, would we think of God, if he has toiled all these aeons and at the last has produced that “consummate specimen of his handiwork, the human soul,” only to destroy it after one fleeting moment of existence? Even to imagine such a thing of God and of his world is utterly impossible. The cosmic process through all these ages must have been working to some permanent end, and must have been seeking some abiding achievement—and what can this be but a soul that shall never die? Evolution leads straight to immortality, or it leads nowhere. Evolution leads to the eternal

life as the next step in the unfolding process, else there is no such unfolding process. The human soul is immortal, else God is mad and evolution itself a baseless dream.

The more thoroughly we comprehend the process of evolution [says John Fiske, as the final result of his survey of the whole evolutionary process], the more we are likely to feel that to deny the everlasting persistence of the spiritual element in man is to rob the whole process of its meaning. It goes far toward putting us to *permanent intellectual confusion*.¹

To the evolutionist, therefore, the denial of immortality is "an intolerable thought."—There must, in the very nature of the case, be a future life for the human soul, in order to justify the universal order, if nothing more. For if evolution has taught us anything it has certainly taught us that the laws which govern the universe are reasonable; that the evolutionary process is guided by a rational idea and controlled by a moral purpose; that the creative energy, through all the ages past, has been moving toward the attainment of something definite and something also permanent. And that "something" is surely nothing other than that which is the flower and fruit of all unfolding life—the aspiring soul of man. When the earth has again been reduced to liquid fire, when the heavens have again "rolled together like a flaming scroll" and all the labour of the ages has

¹ See *The Destiny of Man*, pages 115, 116.

ended in the fire-mist of chaos, when darkness has again enveloped an unformed world and silence is again brooding upon the empty spaces of the deep—all shall not be lost, all this age-long process shall not have been in vain. There shall still remain the soul of man as the evidence of what God has done; there shall still survive the wreckage of space and time the human spirit, as the supreme and indestructible product of God's creative handiwork. If the universe is rational—and evolution proves to us that it is—the soul of man must be immortal, and must endure even when the sun is cold, the stars extinguished, and the earth dissolved to nothing. It cannot be otherwise within the bounds of human reason; else is the world a delusion, the evolutionary process "a vanity of vanities," and God himself an unproductive and hence unintelligent workman. It is this which Dr. Fiske means when he gives us, as his *credo*, "I believe in the immortality of the soul as a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God's work!"¹

VI

Such is the answer which evolution, when thus interpreted, gives to the question of immortality. Other interpretations of this process will come and go, but it is unlikely that there will ever appear a theory of the unfolding process which can dis-

¹ See *The Destiny of Man*, page 116.

pense with the immortality of the soul as its final end and aim.

At this very moment, indeed, the world is captivated by a new interpretation of the story—that of Henri Bergson—which involves elements very different from those which I have just described in what has come to be known as the classic theory of evolution. In place of a conscious, thinking, purposeful God, the French philosopher gives us a blind, unthinking, purposeless *élan vitale*. In place of a great process of development moving deliberately, under sure guidance, to certain ends, Bergson presents an aimless, halting, hit-and-miss movement, flowing along, like a stream of water through a bed of sand, in no one direction and to no definite goal. In place of triumphant co-operation between organism and environment, and especially between matter and spirit, this thinker gives us a picture of unremitting struggle between the creative life and the material substance with which it deals. His conception—or vision, for Bergson is more of a seer than a systematic thinker—is that of a great life-current, flowing through time as a river flows through a continent. This life-current or force is the fundamental reality in nature, the material universe being the reverse side, or the reverse process, of this great flow. Matter, says Bergson, in his *Creative Evolution*, is not a reality at all, but a flowing back of the life that has lost, or is losing, its vitality. Matter is a secondary process de-

rived from the spiritual process of life by inversion, or retrogression, or degeneration. "Life," he says, "is an effort to remount the incline that matter descends." Again, "Life is a succession of jets or geysers, gushing out from an immense reservoir of being, of which each one, falling back, changes into matter." Again he compares the flow of this life-current "to the fiery path torn by the last rocket of a fireworks display through the black cinders of the spent rockets that are falling dead."¹ A still better comparison, is that of a sloping beach, as the tide is running in. A great wave comes rushing from the depths of the ocean, sweeps up the sandy beach, and reaches what is till that moment, perhaps, the highest point of the tidal flow. Then the wave loses its momentum, or vitality, as Bergson would say, and immediately begins to run back into the ocean from which it originally came. It has only receded a few feet, however, when another wave comes sweeping in from the sea. Then there appears a distinct point on the beach where the receding water of the first wave is seen to be struggling and fighting with the advancing water of the second wave. At that particular point, there is a perfect maelstrom of contending energy. At last the oncoming wave overcomes the receding water, engulfs it within its own resistless flow, sweeps up the beach, and reaches perhaps a higher point than that attained by the wave which went

¹ See citations of these figurative definitions from various sources in Dodson's *Bergson and the Modern Spirit*, page 44.

before. Then this wave, in turn, loses its momentum and recedes, only to meet another incoming wave—and the same process is repeated.

Such is Bergson's interpretation of what he calls creative evolution! At the heart of the universe is this great spiritual energy or force, and matter is the stuff upon which it is working, or against which it is fighting, for the achievement of its end. Life is ever pushing and struggling on, and ever being engulfed by receding matter. Thus is the story of the evolutionary process a constant succession of failures or defeats. Each species, or genus, of the organic world represents only one more blind alley down which this unknowing, onward-moving *élan vitale* has proceeded, only to be turned back upon itself and driven in retreat to the main line of advance from which it had wrongly diverged. Again and again has it moved forward, and again and again been overwhelmed. But here and there it has reached a higher mark, or recovered itself for another advance before it has been driven back to its original starting point, and thus little by little recorded a permanent advance. Not until it reached man, however, did this *élan vitale* really come into its own as consciousness, and thus permanently make a break in the resisting barriers of dead matter. Here at last is the life-force, after ages of struggle, defeat, blunder, and failure, apparently triumphant. Man is the last life-wave which races up the beach and marks the advent of the flood-tide.

All this is very different from the story of evolution as told by Spencer, Fiske, Le Conte and Wallace, in its apparent elimination of purpose, precision, end, and even God! Especially is it different in its frank denial of the fundamental assumption of classic evolutionism that man is the predetermined goal toward which the aeons of the past have all the time been moving.

Life [says Bergson], transcends finality, as it transcends all other categories. . . . There has not, therefore, properly speaking, been any project or plan. . . . The rest of nature is not for the sake of man. . . . It would be wrong to regard humanity . . . as prefigured in the evolutionary movement. It cannot even be said to be the outcome of the whole of evolution, for evolution has been accomplished on several divergent lines, and while the human species is at the end of one of them, other lines have been followed with other species at their end.¹

But even here, in this new and strange interpretation of the evolutionary process, immortality seems to be as necessary a factor as in the other. Thus, in that final survey of evolution as he sees and understands it, which Bergson gives us in the closing paragraph of the third chapter of his *Creative Evolution*, does he sweep as inevitably to the immortal hope as his last and crowning word, as a fling sweeps to a magnet. Purpose of some kind seems suddenly to appear, the goal of an

¹ See *Creative Evolution*, pages 265, 266.

eternal life seems ultimately, even if blunderingly, to be attained, God and the soul seem somehow to become realities! Who that has read this passage can ever forget it?

When a strong instinct assures the probability of personal survival, (we) are right not to close (our) ears to its voice; but if there exist "souls" capable of an independent life, whence do they come? When, how, and why do they enter into this body which we see arise, quite naturally, from a mixed cell derived from the bodies of its two parents? All these questions will remain unanswered, a philosophy of intuition will be a negation of science, will be sooner or later swept away by science, if it does not resolve to see the life of the body just where it really is, on the road that leads to the life of the spirit. . . . Life as a whole, from the initial impulsion that thrust it into the world, will appear as a wave which rises, and which is opposed by the descending movement of matter. On the greater part of its surface, at different heights, the current is converted by matter into a vortex. At one point alone it passes freely, dragging with it the obstacle which will weigh on its progress but will not stop it. At this point is humanity; it is our privileged situation. . . . On flows the current, running through human generations, subdividing itself into individuals. This subdivision was vaguely indicated in it, but could not have been made clear without matter. Thus souls are continually being created. . . . They are nothing else than the little rills into which the great river of life divides itself, flowing through the body of humanity. The movement of the stream is distinct from

the river bed, although it must adopt its winding course. Consciousness is distinct from the organism it animates, although it must undergo its vicissitudes. As the possible actions which a state of consciousness indicates are at every instant beginning to be carried out in the nervous centres, the brain underlines at every instant the motor indications of the state of consciousness; but the interdependency of consciousness and brain is limited to this; the destiny of consciousness is not bound up on that account with the destiny of cerebral matter. Finally, consciousness is essentially free; it is freedom itself; but it cannot pass through matter without settling on it, without adapting itself to it; this adaptation is what we call intellectuality; and the intellect, turning itself back toward active, that is to say free, consciousness, naturally makes it enter into the conceptual forms into which it is accustomed to see matter fit. It will therefore always perceive freedom in the form of necessity; it will always neglect the part of novelty or of creation inherent in the free act; it will always substitute for action itself an imitation artificial, approximative, obtained by compounding the old with the old and the same with the same. Thus, to the eyes of a philosophy that attempts to reabsorb intellect in intuition, many difficulties vanish or become light. But such a doctrine does not only facilitate speculation; it gives us also more power to act and to live. For, with it, we feel ourselves no longer isolated in humanity, humanity no longer seems isolated in the nature which it dominates. As the smallest grain of dust is bound up with our entire solar system, drawn along with it in that undivided movement of descent which is materiality itself, so all organized beings, from the

humblest to the highest, from the first origins of life to the time in which we are, and in all places as in all times, do but evidence a single impulsion, the inverse of the movement of matter, and in itself indivisible. All the living hold together, and all yield to the same tremendous push. The animal takes its stand on the plant, man bestrides animality, and the whole of humanity, in space and in time, is one immense army galloping beside and before and behind each of us in an overwhelming charge able to beat down every resistance and clear the most formidable obstacles, *perhaps even death*.¹

VII

Thus from the standpoint of evolution, which presents man not as an individual but as an integral part of the cosmic process, does immortality appear not only probable, but inevitable! Probability here passes over into something very like certainty. If we reject this belief in a future life, as Professor Haeckel rejects it, for instance, then must we perforce call the universe a riddle, even as he is obliged to do in his famous book of that title. But if we accept this belief, as Fiske and Bergson accept it, for instance, then all things become plain. Evolution, matched and completed by the immortal life, tells us of a universe which lives and moves and has its being in a creative spirit; a universe which is guided by divine reason and controlled by divine purpose; a universe which is evolving to the "consummate achievement" of

¹ See *Creative Evolution*, pages 269-71.

an immortal soul; a universe which is moving onward to the farthest of all goals, that of a spiritual life which shall endure when systems fail and planets crash to ruin. In the light of all that has been and all that is, in the light of all that has been done for him and in him, it is certain that man must be able to survive the wreck of time, and live on forever as the permanent triumph of the creative spirit, the everlasting justification of "God's way of doing things." The whole history of evolution is but the story of man's birth and growth, and in the wonder of this miracle is the pledge of eternal life.

CHAPTER V

IMMORTALITY AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

“But does the evidence afford us proof of immortality? Obviously it cannot; nor can any investigations yield scientific proof of that larger, higher, and enduring life which we desire and mean by immortality. . . . Our own limitations, in fact, make it impossible for the evidence to convey the assurance that we are communicating with what is best and noblest in those who have passed into the unseen. In fact, psychical research, though it may strengthen its foundations, cannot take away the place of religion.”—W. F. Barrett, F. R. S., in *Psychical Research*, page 245.

THE arguments discussed in the last two chapters would seem to indicate that a strong case might be made out for our conception of the immortality of the soul. Especially is it gratifying to discover that the revolutionary doctrine of evolution, which so dominates the thought of our time, not only does not overthrow or even weaken our argument for the immortal hope, but actually adds one more intimation of the eternal destiny of man to the many which have been previously discovered. Whether we view man in his individual capacity as a moral and spiritual being, or look at him from the standpoint of the universe

as the last step in the triumphant progress of unfolding life, we see in either case the promise of his continued existence beyond the limits of this present world. Both in himself and in his relation to the cosmic process, he is his own best evidence of immortality.

I

In spite, however, of the undoubted strength of these considerations, and in spite of the satisfaction which they have brought to inquiring minds and longing hearts in days gone by, it still must be admitted as an indubitable fact that they have practically ceased to bring conviction in our time. Men today are looking for something more than anything that we have yet presented. They are no longer content with intimations, or probabilities, or even reasonable certainties. The modern student wants proof; and since he is getting proof today of practically everything else which enters into the field of knowledge or speculation, he sees no reason why he should not have proof also of immortality as the condition of his acceptance of this doctrine. I am through once for all with accepting things on faith, is his declaration; give me proof, on the basis of facts observed and verified, or else let me be excused!

The explanation of this attitude of mind is to be found in the distinctive character of the age in which we are living. It has long since become a

commonplace to call this age an age of science, by which is meant of course nothing more nor less than an age of ordered knowledge. Our period is one of careful investigation, accurate demonstration, and exact truth. The astronomer has turned his telescope toward the immeasurable spaces of the heavens, and there, by patient watching through the long hours of the night, has discovered and formulated the laws of planetary motion, and has proved the reality of these laws by a reasoning so exact that he can prophesy a certain conjunction of the stars a century hence to the very minute. The chemist has turned his microscope toward the earth and by careful analysis of the composition of matter, has revealed and formulated the laws of chemical affinity, and proved the reality of these laws by a demonstration so exact that he can foretell the immediate consequence of any given combination of particular elements. The physicist, with his weights and balances, mirrors and candles, tubes and wires, has investigated the problems of physical energy as manifested in the various forms of heat, light, electricity, and magnetism, and by experiments of the greatest delicacy has proved the reality of his laws of motion, refracted light, and specific gravity.

In short, we are living in an age so dominated by the methods and the ideals of physical science, that we have come to identify knowledge with physical demonstration, and to define reality as

that which can be seen and felt and heard, analysed and tested and proved. We refuse to accept anything as real which cannot be subjected to actual physical experiment. We decline to believe anything as true which cannot be proved by mathematics, as planetary motion can be proved—by analysis and experiment, as chemical affinities can be proved—by exact measurements of weights, degrees of heat, or rates of motion, as the laws of physical energy can be proved. We ask for proof, and if this proof is not forthcoming, we refuse to be convinced! The attitude of our generation is that which finds its noblest embodiment in the person of the agnostic, Thomas Huxley, who, in his *Essay on Agnosticism and Christianity*, laid it down as the working principle of his life—"It is wrong for a man to say that he is certain of the objective truth of any proposition, unless he can produce the proof which logically justifies that certainty."¹

II

Now it is this insistent demand for proof, so characteristic of our time, which has entered into the field of speculation on the immortal life, and laid down therein the challenge for scientific demonstration as the condition of belief. The first result of this challenge, of course, was the widespread development of the agnostic attitude,

¹ See *Science and Christian Tradition*, page 310.

of which we have just spoken. But very soon men began to ask themselves why the problem of immortality should not be studied in the same way that any other problem is studied, and why the result of such study should not be just the kind of demonstration that was demanded. And forthwith there was launched a movement for the scientific investigation of this and kindred problems in the realm of spiritual phenomena, which constitutes one of the most remarkable events that the history of human thought has known.

This movement had its beginning in the year 1882, with the organization in England of the well-known Society for Psychical Research. Work of a strictly scientific kind had been attempted in this field as early as 1871, by the eminent physicist, Sir William Crookes. But the real organization of this undertaking dates from the foundation of what is familiarly known today as the S. P. R. Throughout the more than thirty years of its existence, this Society has had associated with its membership and work many of the most distinguished and influential men of our time. The list of its presidents constitutes a roll of honour which could with difficulty be duplicated elsewhere. Beginning with Professor Henry Sidgwick, one of the great ethical philosophers of the nineteenth century, there follow in order Professor Balfour Stewart, Right Hon. A. J. Balfour, Professor William James, Sir William Crookes, Mr. F. W. H. Myers, Sir Oliver Lodge, Professor

W. F. Barrett, Professor C. Richet, Right Hon. Gerald N. Balfour, Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, Mr. H. H. Smith, Mr. Andrew Lang, Right Rev. Bishop Boyd Carpenter, and Professor Henri Bergson. On the council in recent years have been such men as Lord Rayleigh, Mr. G. Lowes Dickinson, Professor F. C. S. Schiller, and Professor Gilbert Murray.

A branch of this Society was established in the United States in 1885. No such galaxy of names has been clustered about the organization in this country as in Great Britain, but not a few men of distinction have been associated with its work in one way or another. Among these, the late Professor William James, of Harvard University, stands pre-eminent. Others who may be named are the late Professor S. P. Langley, of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, Professor Josiah Royce, of Harvard, and his two distinguished associates, Professors Bowditch and Pickering, Professor James H. Hyslop, late of Columbia University, and Dr. Minot J. Savage, the distinguished Unitarian clergyman.

The work of the Society for Psychical Research, both in England and in America, has been of the most extensive character, by no means confined to the study of the problem of immortality. True to its name, and in accordance with its declared intention from the first, it has given itself unreservedly to the investigation of all psychical phenomena which have seemed to be of a super-

natural, or rather supernormal, character, and thus outside the recognized limits of orthodox psychology. Thought reading and thought transference, mesmerism, hypnotism and other varieties of suggestion, experimental and spontaneous telepathy, previsions and visual hallucinations, dreams and crystal-visions, supernormal perception or "seeing without eyes," as it has been called—all these extraordinary phenomena have been observed and studied with the utmost seriousness, and volumes of valuable data, supported by unimpeachable testimony, collected and published. Even though the Society for Psychical Research had never gone beyond this vast domain of strange occurrence, the world's debt to its years of patient and exhaustive investigation would be well-nigh incalculable. The results of its labours may seem unsatisfactory and some of its conclusions questionable, but it has nevertheless done the invaluable service of carrying the clear white light of science into a realm long abandoned to the murky darkness of superstition, and thus advancing to just that extent at least the borders of knowledge.

It is with the work of the Society in the field of "spiritualism" as it has been termed, however, that we are more particularly concerned, for it is here that the opportunity has been found and the endeavour made to demonstrate the reality of the immortal life. This was one of the prime objects for which the Society was organized—to conduct "an inquiry," in the words of the official state-

ment, "into various alleged phenomena apparently inexplicable by known laws of nature, and commonly referred by Spiritualists to the agency of extra-terrene intelligences, and by others to some unknown physical force." And this object has never been lost sight of. Indeed, it is just here, in the pursuit of this inquiry, that the Society has attracted the largest degree of popular attention, and done its most interesting, if not its most important, work. What has actually been accomplished is still very much of a moot question. But that the possibility of demonstrating the truth of immortality is dependent upon the successful outcome of this deliberate scientific inquiry into the Unseen is practically beyond dispute.

III

In order to see just what the activities of the Society for Psychical Research in this shadowy field really involve, and what relation they bear to the general question of continued existence after death, it will be necessary at this point to consider what must be done in order to demonstrate the reality of the immortal life upon an experiential basis. So far as I can understand the factors in the situation, the proof which we desire can only be had in one of two ways.

In the first place, we must ourselves break through the veil which hides the future from the present, and thus personally penetrate the myste-

ries of the Unseen. We must, after the example of Omar Khayyam, send our souls

. . . into the invisible
Some message of that after life to spell.

So far as we are concerned on this side of the grave, we are faced by the same problem by which Columbus was faced when he was asked for evidence of his faith that the world was round. He could point to all sorts of intimations and probabilities for the reason that was in him, but at bottom there was only one sure way of proving the truth of his belief—and that was to set sail out into the west, and by journeying straight on towards the setting sun, come at last to the ports of India. To reach the east by sailing west would prove his point! And so with us today in our faith in immortality. If we want to establish the actual truth of this conception, we must ourselves go into that far country of the future, and thus prove our faith by our works!

The impossibility of this method of reaching our point is, of course, manifest upon the face of things. Ulysses, to be sure, is said to have descended into the nether world and there talked with the mighty Agamemnon and the great Achilles; but this exploit has ever been interpreted as one of the legends of an age fruitful of myth and romance. Dante wrote so vividly of his journey down the circles of *Inferno*, up the ridges of *Purgatorio*, to

the resplendent heights of *Paradiso*, that the superstitious townsmen of Italy, so we are told, would point to his melancholy figure as that of the man who had talked with the damned in hell and with the angels in heaven; but no one in our age has ever regarded his exploit as other than a consummate achievement of the constructive imagination and a soaring flight of ecstatic love. More recent is the claim of Swedenborg to have been admitted into the spirit world, and very explicit is the seer's description, in his *Heaven and Hell*, of what he saw and heard; but most people today would agree with Emerson's assertion, in his *Essay on Swedenborg*, that the extraordinary experiences of this extraordinary man must be described as an "example of a deranged balance."¹ It is surely not in this direction that we can hope to obtain our proof of the reality of the unseen world. If this world exists at all, it must be spiritual and not material in character; and the condition of entrance therein must necessarily be that doffing of the flesh and that surrender of the faculties of sense which only death can accomplish for us. Theoretically this method of demonstration constitutes a part of our analysis of possibilities, but practically it offers no solution of our problem whatsoever.

But there is a second way in which proof of the future life may possibly be had! I refer to the fact that, in lieu of visiting the realms of immor-

¹ See *Representative Men*, page 99.

tality and seeing for ourselves, we may receive visitations or communications from those who have entered into the Unseen, and thus obtain definite evidence of their continued existence after death. That is, while we may not be able to project ourselves forward, the dead, as we term them, may very well be able to send themselves back; and if we can note and verify such return, either in person or by message, we shall be in possession of a conclusive proof of our hypothesis. The problem here is very much the same as in the case of the suggestion that Mars is inhabited. It is practically certain that we shall never be able to journey to that planet and discover if there are living creatures upon its surface. It also seems probable, to say the least, that the Man from Mars, who has long played so conspicuous a part in certain novels and dramas, will always remain a supposititious figure. It does not seem quite so impossible to imagine, however, that, if there are inhabitants on this distant sphere, we may some day receive signs or communications which would give us evidence of their presence. Certainly, this is what we must have if this conception is ever to pass out of the realm of reasonable conjecture into the realm of accurate knowledge, for suggestive as is Professor Percival Lowell's canal theory, it can by no means be regarded as a final demonstration of the truth of his not improbable thesis. And if these signs or communications ever did come, and could be proved to have their origin in this par-

ticular planet, of course no further denials would be possible. With the receipt and verification of messages, the case would be closed. And so with the case of those who have "shuffled off this mortal coil!" If we could only see them, or hear from them, or receive from them actual evidence of their existence, how simple the problem would be! Indeed the problem as a problem would disappear, for the reality of the unseen world would be absolutely demonstrated forthwith!

Now it is a remarkable fact that this kind of proof seems as much open to our inquiry as the other kind of proof is closed. From the beginning of human history, man has felt himself to be surrounded by the living dead, and has believed himself to be the recipient of communications from their encompassing spirits. Indeed, if he has cherished in all ages an almost universal belief in the immortality of the soul, it is largely because he has apparently undergone the almost universal experience of having the departed do this very thing of returning into his life, and giving to him impressive and at times startling evidence of their presence. Ghosts and apparitions, spectral groves and haunted houses, inexplicable rappings and movements of physical objects, automatic writings, spoken communications dispatched through mediums and clairvoyants—these are only a few of the more important ways in which the so-called dead have apparently revealed the fact of their continued existence in another world. In-

stances of this sort of thing are simply innumerable, and the forms under which they appear are infinitely varied in character. Assuredly if mere quantitative accumulation of testimony and apparent uniformity of experience count for anything, we would seem to have here all the material that we need for our demonstration of the immortal life. The case would seem to be proved by a mere recital of the record. And yet never has the proof been accepted, or the record tested.

This literature is enormous [says Professor James, in his essay on *What Psychological Research Has Accomplished*], but it is practically worthless for evidential purposes. Facts enough are cited, indeed; but the records of them are so fallible and imperfect that at most they lead to the opinion that it may be well to keep a window open upon that quarter in one's mind.¹

Now it is just here that the Society for Psychological Research has entered into the field and done work of the most vital character. From the beginning it has taken the position that these supposed supernatural experiences were facts of life like any other facts, and worthy therefore of careful study and investigation. Too long, and without reason, have they been abandoned to the gaping bewilderment of the credulous multitudes. What is needed is that the same spirit of exact and unimpassioned inquiry should be brought to bear on these obscure questions which has enabled science

¹ See *The Will to Believe*, page 305.

to solve so many problems once no less obscure nor less contemptuously regarded. If this be done, it will undoubtedly be found, as one statement puts it, that "amidst much illusion and deception there exists an important body of facts, hitherto unrecognized by science, which, if incontestably established, would be of supreme importance and interest." That these phenomena all constitute *bona fide* communications from the world beyond the grave is exceedingly doubtful. But if there is even a small proportion which can be so explained, it is of the first importance that we should know this. For it is only in such possible happenings as these that any scientific demonstration of the reality of the immortal life can ever be secured. Right here, if anywhere, in this shadowy realm of inexplicable occurrences—few of them serious, most of them fantastic—is where we must find the proof of our faith in things eternal, if such proof is ever to be had. Therefore is it not for us to ignore or smile at these phenomena, but apply to their investigation the best scientific methods that we have. It may be that we shall find nothing but a mass of disordered superstition, but it may also be that we shall succeed at last in bridging the chasm between this world and the next!

IV

It was in this high spirit of serious scientific interest that the Society for Psychical Research

entered upon its investigations of every phenomenon which could even be remotely interpreted as possibly constituting a communication from the life beyond the grave. Very speedily it was discovered that this vast array of extraordinary occurrences might be divided, for purposes of study and interpretation, into two classes.

In the first place, there are what Maeterlinck terms, in his exceedingly interesting survey of the subject in *Our Eternity*, "real, objective, and spontaneous apparitions, or direct manifestations."¹ These are what we would call, in ordinary parlance, plain, matter-of-fact "ghosts!" A typical example may be taken, by way of illustration, from the seventh volume of the *Proceedings* of the Society.

On October 24, 1889, Edmund Dunn, brother of Mrs. Agnes Paquet, was serving as fireman on the tug *Wolf*, . . . in Chicago Harbour. At about 3 o'clock A. M. the tug fastened to a vessel . . . to tow her up the river. While adjusting the tow-line, Mr. Dunn fell or was thrown overboard by the tow-line, and drowned.

Mrs. Paquet's Statement:

I arose about the usual hour on the morning of the accident. . . . I awoke feeling gloomy and depressed, which feeling I could not shake off. After breakfast my husband went to his work, and . . . the children were . . . sent to school, leaving me alone in the house. Soon after this I decided to . . . drink some

¹ See *Our Eternity*, page 83.

tea, hoping it would relieve me of the gloomy feelings afore-mentioned. I went into the pantry, took down the tea-canister, and as I turned around my brother Edmund . . . stood before me and only a few feet away. The apparition stood with back towards me . . . and was in the act of falling forward—away from me—seemingly impelled by . . . a loop of rope drawing against his legs. The vision lasted but a moment, disappearing over a low railing, . . . but was very distinct. I dropped the tea, clasped my hands to my face and exclaimed, “My God! Ed. is drowned!”

At about 10:30 A. M. my husband received a telegram from Chicago, announcing the drowning of my brother. . . . When he arrived home I . . . gave him a minute description of what I had seen. I stated that my brother, as I saw him, was bareheaded, had on a heavy blue sailor’s shirt, no coat, and that he went over the rail or bulwark. I noticed that his pants legs were rolled up enough to show the white lining inside. I also described the appearance of the boat at the point where my brother went overboard.

I am not nervous, and neither before nor since have I had any experience in the least degree similar to that above related.¹

It may be added that Mr. Paquet went at once to Chicago and found that the particulars of the brother’s death were exactly as his wife had seen them. A study of the time revealed the fact, according to Mr. Sidgwick’s account, that Mrs. Paquet’s “impression was not contemporaneous

¹ Quoted in Barrett’s *Psychical Research*, pages 124-27.

with the event to which it related, but occurred some six hours afterwards."

A famous case of just this kind was the appearance of the figure of Admiral Tryon, at a social function in London, at the moment when he was sinking with his flagship, H. M. S. *Victoria*, in the Mediterranean. According to reports widely published and carefully verified at the time, the apparition of this well-known naval officer was distinctly seen by at least two persons, and of course several hours before news was received in England of the disaster which cost him his life.

Instances of this kind are abundant. Edmund Gurney, who made a special study of these phenomena and published his findings in his exhaustive volumes on *Phantasms of the Living*, discusses no less than seven hundred cases of apparitions which he had collected. Since this time, the *Journal* of the Society for Psychical Research has never failed to record new ones. A "census of hallucinations," instituted by Gurney and continued after his death by the Society, has yielded statements from over twenty-five thousand persons; and the result would seem to show that, in England, about one adult person in ten has had some experience of this kind at least once in his lifetime. A great number of these occurrences were "veridical," *i. e.*, they coincide with some calamity which has happened to the person who appears. Gurney explains this type of coincidence on the ground that the victim of calamity is, at the

moment of his sudden dissolution, given power to impress himself upon the mind of the "percipient" in the form of a vision or hallucination. Other distinguished men who have studied phenomena of this kind and recorded actual cases are Sir William Crookes, Alfred Russel Wallace, Robert Dale Owen, and Professor Aksakoff. All have registered their belief in the reality of the occurrences and their significance from the point of view of the general problem of immortality.

The alleged communications from the other world which are grouped in the second class, are much more extensive in number and variety, and also much more important in character. These are all indirect manifestations, obtained through the agency of mediums; and take the form either of such physical phenomena as responsive rappings, luminous appearances, levitation of articles of furniture, etc., or else of messages delivered by word of mouth or by automatic writing.

Of the physical phenomena, the most amazing are those seen and recorded by Sir William Crookes during his experiments with his famous medium, Home. One of the most startling was the taking of a red-hot coal, a little smaller than a cricket-ball, out of the hearth fire, and the carrying of it up and down the room. One of the witnesses to this act records that "before he (Home) threw it in the fire, I put my hand close to it and felt the heat like that of a live coal."¹ Sir William

¹ Quoted in Barrett's *Psychical Research*, page 217.

saw this done more than once, and states that no known chemical preparation, even had Home tried to use any, could have preserved the skin from injury; and yet a careful examination of his fingers revealed no signs of burning. Other phenomena, some of them of levitation, were repeatedly witnessed at the hands of this astonishing medium; and all of those observed by Crookes, it may be well to note, took place in his own house, and some of the most remarkable under the glare of an electric light! Incredible as the testimony undoubtedly appears to one who comes to its examination for the first time, and great as is the temptation to cast it aside along with the innumerable stories of a similar kind, we are forced in this case to give it recognition, if only because of the standing of Sir William Crookes in the world of science as a skilled and accurate observer. In spite of ridicule and rebuke, and in spite also of discredit cast upon Home, Crookes has never deviated from his original position that the phenomena which he witnessed were genuine, and were of a supernatural, or at least supernormal, character.

Much more important are the verbal communications which are said to come from the living dead through the "possessed" persons of mediums, in either written or spoken form. These phenomena run all the way from the scrawlings with pencil or planchette of the many persons who seem to be endowed with crude "mediumistic" powers, to

the amazing exploits of a man like the Rev. W. Stainton Moses or of a woman like Mrs. Piper. A large part of the work of the Society has been devoted to the careful and prolonged study of the more remarkable of these mediums, and for a first-hand examination of the results one must have resort to the long series of volumes of the Society's *Proceedings*. Useful interpretations of these "communications," from the standpoint of spiritualistic hypothesis, have been published in Sir Oliver Lodge's *The Survival of Man*, and especially in F. W. H. Myers's work entitled, *Human Personality and Its Survival After Bodily Death*.

With all of these mediums we have practically the same phenomena, varying only in the unimportant details of their presentation. Thus some of the mediums give their communications while in a trance and others while in a normal state of consciousness; sometimes, as has been said, they write and sometimes they speak. From the standpoint of those who believe in spirit communication, the medium is "possessed" or "controlled" by different familiar spirits, who use this means of making their continued existence known to those whom they have left. Sometimes a medium is "possessed" by more than one spirit, one using her lips for communication and one her hand. Sometimes the spirits assume different personalities. Thus Mrs. Piper's "controls" have become known as Phinuit, George Pelham, Doctor, and Rector;

while Stainton Moses had the almost unique distinction of being the agent of certain well-known dead of ancient and medieval times. Almost always, with the greater mediums, it has been found possible to hold definite conversations with the "controls," as witness the interminable conversations recorded in the *Proceedings*. In every case, the test of communication as a *bona fide* message from the world beyond, has been the impossibility of the facts communicated being known either to the medium or to any person even remotely in touch with the medium. Two very famous incidents may here be cited by way of illustration.

On a certain Sunday night, in his London lodgings, Mr. Moses's hand wrote the announcement of the death of a lady in a country house two hundred miles away. Mr. Moses had met this lady once at a séance, but knew nothing about her, or of her illness and death. A few days later, Mr. Moses wrote what purported to be a message from the lady herself, with the information that the hand-writing was like her own, and therefore could be taken as evidence of her identity. On receiving other messages, many of which contained personal matters, Mr. Moses pasted down the pages of his note-book containing the material, marked them outside "Private," and mentioned them to nobody. Years afterwards, Mr. Myers, into whose hands Mr. Moses's papers had come, opened these pages, and, on reading the messages, recognized

the lady as one whom he had known well. On studying the handwriting, it was found, in the judgment of an expert and of her son, to bear unmistakable resemblances to that of the letters which she had left.¹

A still more remarkable case is one cited by Maeterlinck, in his *Our Eternity*, as an instance of "the farthest point which it is possible to attain" along these lines of research. One day while "sitting" with Mrs. Piper, Sir Oliver Lodge handed her a gold watch, which had belonged to an uncle who had died some twenty years before, and which had just now been sent to him by that uncle's twin-brother. On receiving the watch, Mrs. Piper began to relate a great number of details concerning the childhood of this dead uncle, all of them unknown to Sir Oliver. Upon inquiry of the surviving uncle, most of these details were confirmed, although the memory of them had long since lapsed, until revived by this occurrence; and those which this man could not recall, were later confirmed by a third brother, an old sea-captain in Cornwall, who expressed amazement that such strange questions should be put to him!²

An extension of the possibilities of this inquiry has come with the deaths of some of those who have most earnestly investigated these spiritistic phenomena. Myers, Richard Hodgson, and William James have all departed and have thus given the

¹ Cited in Barrett's *Psychical Research*, page 224.

² See *Our Eternity*, pages 115-16.

researchers upon this side the great advantage of having comrades upon the other side, who understand the problem and know what must be done. Myers and Hodgson especially promised to come back, and urged their friends to be on the lookout for them. Both ostensibly kept their word, the former through the medium, Mrs. Thompson, and the latter through Mrs. Piper. Reports of communications from William James have already appeared more than once since his death. In no case, however, have these phenomena come up to what may rightly be described as reasonable expectations. Conditions could not have been more favourable than in the Hodgson case. Dr. Hodgson, during his lifetime, was a most indefatigable and convinced labourer in this field. The medium was Mrs. Piper, with whom he had worked twice a week for many years. The "sitter" was William James, a frequent worker with Mrs. Piper, and an intimate friend of Hodgson. The sittings were numerous—the search prolonged! And yet in his voluminous report, which covers over a hundred and twenty pages of the *Proceedings* (volume 23), Professor James does not find it possible to say anything definite. "I myself feel as if an external will to communicate were probably there. . . . But if asked whether the will to communicate be Hodgson's, I remain uncertain and await more facts." Even the elaborate system of "cross-correspondences," upon which such great hopes were at one time

placed, have not cleared up the matter. They have added to the complexity of the problem, but have left the evidential value of the communications about where it was before.¹

v

Now what is to be said about all this work of the Society for Psychical Research, from the standpoint of a demonstration of our faith in the immortal life? Has all of this careful investigation brought us any facts which would warrant us in asserting that the case has been proved?

Before coming to the immediate consideration of this inquiry, it may be well to make a few observations upon the character of the work accomplished, as a kind of preliminary explanation of our final judgment in the matter.

In the first place, let it be noted that there can be nothing but praise for the determination of the founders of this Society to carry the exact methods of scientific investigation into this realm of mist and shadow, and equal praise for them and their successors for their insistence that the work should be carried on until some definite conclusions could be reached. Professor Sidgwick was right, when he declared, in his introductory address as President of the Society, that the attitude of the world toward all these questions of hypnotism, mind-

¹ For details of the "cross-correspondence" records, see *Proceedings*, volumes 20-25.

reading, telepathy, apparitions, communications from the dead, etc., had long been nothing short of a scandal—on the one side, as he put it, indiscriminate credulity on the part of those who had first-hand knowledge of the facts, and on the other hand open contempt and a flat refusal to investigate on the part of those who had scientific knowledge and training. Especially was this true in an age which prided itself upon its scientific character! Here were the scholars of the world pushing their researches into the remotest realms of the natural world. Nothing seemed too lowly for their attention or too distant for their pursuit. And yet here, at the very threshold of the mind itself, was this vast area of experience which science seemed quite content to abandon to the “disorderly mystery of ignorance.” Unquestionably the great mass of this experience is a poisonous compound of illusion, superstition, and fraud. But must not much the same thing be said of the gathered material of history and religion? And just as it has been found to be true that underneath the legends of history and the dogmas of religion there is a certain body of fact, why may it not be also true that, underneath all the error, credulity, and falsehood of so-called psychic phenomena, there is a residuum of reality which cannot safely be neglected? In any case, if we be true scientists, must we not proceed on this assumption? Or—still better—must we not at least investigate before we laugh and turn away? Do we really know enough to

justify our scorn and neglect, if we have never observed and tested? Such were the questions which inevitably pressed for answer in such an age as ours, and he was the true scientist who responded to their challenge in humility of spirit, and sought here as elsewhere for the facts. Men had taken every conceivable attitude toward this matter, from reverence on the one hand to amusement and scorn upon the other, except that one which is alone scientifically defensible—namely, rational inquiry! Now at last, thanks to a few brave spirits, this has come. Hence the satisfaction with which today we record the organization of this important scientific work, and the prosecution of its difficult and oftentimes tedious task through more than thirty years!

In the second place, we must note that the researches of the Society have been carried on from the beginning in accordance with the most rigid scientific principles, and are to be regarded as among the most creditable scientific endeavours of modern times. This of course is just contrary to the commonly accepted opinion, even among scientific men! Ordinarily it is assumed, without evidence or argument, that the members of the Society for Psychical Research are committed to a belief in the reality of the phenomena which they are studying, and are simply engaged in the pleasant task of establishing, by hook or by crook, the truth of their preconceived ideas. The mere fact that a man is interested in these matters is accepted

as evidence of a certain weakness in his mentality. His identification with the Society is taken as proof positive either of his essentially credulous nature, or his approaching senility. Even as late as 1914, a man of the eminence of Sir Oliver Lodge can find it possible to speak of these facts, in his *Presidential Address* before the Royal Society, as "scorned by orthodox science," and describe his reference to them as an annoyance to his hearers.¹ It would be difficult to name many men more distinguished in the modern world of science than Sir William Crookes, Sir Oliver Lodge, Alfred Russel Wallace, Henry Sidgwick, William James, and Henri Bergson. And yet it is still light-heartedly assumed that the workers in this field are not scientific in their methods and aims, but sentimental and superstitious!

Now as a matter of fact, of course, nothing could be much farther from the truth than such an idea as this. To begin with, the Society is uncommitted to any theory, or belief, of any kind. No member accepts any particular explanation of the facts involved, or even admits that there are any facts. Faithful to its carefully selected name, the organization simply asserts that in this mystic realm of psychic experience, there is a great inchoate mass of phenomena which calls for systematic "research." What the end of this "research" will be—whether the unveiling of universal fraud, the discovery of hitherto unsus-

¹ See *Continuity*, pages 102-103.

pected mental faculties and powers, or the proof of the reality of the unseen world—cannot be foreseen. But this end, whatever it may be, is not the issue involved. Like any other great scientific organization, the Society for Psychical Research is concerned simply and solely with finding out what is true, and then publishing this truth to the world. Said Mr. Andrew Lang, in his *Presidential Address*, "The Society, as such, has no views, no beliefs, no hypotheses, except, perhaps, the opinion that there is an open field of inquiry; that not all the faculties and potentialities of man have been studied and explained up to date, in terms of nerve and brain."¹

Furthermore, in exploring this "open field of inquiry," the Society has practised the most rigid methods of investigation. It has been scientific in the strictest sense of that word. Maeterlinck rightly describes its work as "a masterpiece of scientific patience and conscientiousness." Not an incident has been admitted into the record which has not been supported by unimpeachable evidence; and the canons of evidence used have been the strictest known. No better proof of the rigid character of the investigations conducted by the Society could be given than the secession some years ago of a number of members because of the impossible standard of proof exacted; and the bitter attacks to which it has ever been subjected by the Spiritualist press, which has constantly

¹ Quoted in Barrett's *Psychical Research*, page 247.

referred to it as the Society "for the suppression of facts," "for the wholesale imputation of imposture," and "for the repudiation of every revelation . . . pressing upon humanity from the regions of light and knowledge."¹ Indeed, it is not too much to say that the attitude of the Psychical Researchers from the beginning has been prevailingly that of deep-rooted scepticism. Doubt until doubt becomes absurd; disbelieve until disbelief is impossible; "prove all things, hold fast that which is good"—these have been the watchwords throughout. With the result that the *Proceedings*, whatever else they may or may not be, are a model of scientific procedure!

In fact [says Professor James in his essay on *What Psychical Research Has Accomplished*], were I asked to point to a scientific journal where hard-headedness and never-sleeping suspicion of sources of error might be seen in their full bloom, I think I should have to fall back on the *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research. The common run of papers, . . . which one finds in other professional organs, are apt to show a far lower level of critical conscientiousness.²

After all due credit, however, has been given to the Society for its true scientific purpose and its scrupulous conscientiousness in the furtherance of its work, certain very serious reservations must be noted, or at least difficulties recognized.

¹ Cited in Maeterlinck's *Our Eternity*, page 83.

² See *The Will to Believe*, page 303.

Thus, in the first place, the cultivators of psychical research stand alone among scientists in being under the constant necessity of guarding their work against the vitiating entanglements of fraud. Such a complication is almost unheard of in any other department of scientific investigation. Now and again there has appeared a dishonest claim, a deceptive statement, or even a forged record. But such episodes are so few in the activities of modern science, as to be practically negligible. The scientist of our time feels perfectly safe in going ahead under the assumption that the word and work of his colleagues and assistants are to be trusted. Not so is it, however, in the field of psychical research. On the contrary, the assumption must be all the other way. Long experience with mediums shows conclusively that a great number of them are out and out fakers, and that a majority at least of their exploits are based on nothing but trickery and fraud. Some of the most distinguished of these mediums have practised their wonders for long periods of time only to be exposed in the end—as witness Eusapia Paladino who, after a brilliant career of success, was detected in outrageous fraud; and even those who have not been exposed, have nearly always been plausibly charged with dishonesty—as witness Crookes's medium, Home. The possibilities of fraud in this work are impressively indicated by the statement of Hermann, the famous prestidigitateur, that he had devoted years of study

to so-called spiritistic phenomena, and had yet to see the exploit which he could not reproduce by the ordinary methods of sleight-of-hand. And these possibilities are of course indefinitely magnified by the peculiar insistence of mediums upon performing their feats under conditions which make the perpetration of fraud easy and its discovery difficult. The successful experiments of Crookes in the full glare of an electric light would seem to make this contention ridiculous. But still is this condition imposed by the mediums, and still is it granted by the investigators. It is of course quite impossible to prove that these extraordinary conditions are not requisite for successful results; but the sceptic is certainly pardonable if he argues that, if phenomena do not occur under normal conditions it is not the phenomena themselves which are prevented from taking place but the undiscovered frauds to which their appearance under abnormal conditions is due.¹

In the second place, the psychical researchers find it utterly impossible to conform to one of the most important of the standard requirements of modern scientific work—namely, the verification of results. In all investigation in the various fields of natural science, no discovery is accepted until

¹ It should be stated that the element of fraud intrudes almost exclusively into the phenomena of visual hallucination and levitation. In the phenomena of verbal or written communications it is not so serious; and in the case of the greater mediums, like Dr. Moses and Mrs. Piper, is not to be considered at all.

the experience upon which it is based has been reproduced by other competent observers and the discovery repeated. When an astronomer at Lick reports the appearance of a new star in the heavens, a hundred telescopes are at once pointed to the spot designated, and the star re-located by as many different astronomers. When M. Curie and Mme. Curie isolated radium, scientists throughout the world acquainted themselves with the details of the experiments of these two experts, and proceeded at once to reproduce them. When Dr. Friedmann proclaimed the discovery of his tuberculosis vaccine, physicians everywhere insisted that they should be allowed to use the new remedy in their own hospitals and watch results. And in all of these cases, it is only when the results obtained by other men verify the results obtained by the original discoverer, that these results are accepted. Verification, in other words, is an accepted condition of scientific advance! And it is just this verification which the students of psychical research cannot secure. No experience undergone by one man can be reproduced under the same conditions by another. Several men, observing the same phenomenon, can report the same results. But repetition, again and again, upon the sure foundation of which all other scientific discoveries are based, cannot here be had!

And lastly, it must be admitted, with however much regret, that psychical research lacks that

characteristic of "cumulative achievement" which is the sure mark of scientific vitality. Every true science has proceeded in exactly the same way—by making constant little additions to the original deposit of fact by a discovery here, a correction there, a new viewpoint somewhere else. Old methods are displaced by new; ancient sources of error are corrected; long-standing problems definitely settled and fresh ones created. Take the story of evolution, for example! Think of the innumerable revisions and enlargements to which the original Darwinian theory has been subjected, and the changed aspect which it has assumed as the result of fifty years of unremitting investigation! It is a story of controversies, set-backs, reversals, old errors, and new hypotheses. But always we have the sense of progress, of construction, of sure even if slow approach to truth! Thirty years of psychical research, however, have given us nothing of this kind. The work, to be sure, has been exhaustive; the records enormous in quantity; numerous frauds have been exposed, and the reality of certain isolated experiences proved. But as regards the basic problem at the heart of it all, we are just where we were at the beginning. In every new case that comes up for investigation, the inquirer begins at practically the same point where the founders of the Society began in 1882! What wonder, in the face of this fact, that psychical research has been recently dubbed "a Sisyphus among the sciences!"

VI

With these preliminary observations as to the general character of the work which has been accomplished, we are now ready, perhaps, to answer the decisive question as to whether anything definite has been found as regards the future life. Do the investigations of this Society give us the proof of immortality which our age seems to be more and more demanding? Can we accept the doctrine of Sir Oliver Lodge, in his *Continuity*, that the evidence obtained "goes to prove that discarnate intelligence under certain conditions may interact with us on the material side, . . . and that gradually we may hope to attain some understanding of the nature of a larger, perhaps ethereal existence, and of the conditions regulating intercourse across the chasm."¹

It must be admitted, I believe, that, whatever else the psychical researchers may or may not have done, they have at least demonstrated that, amid all the fraud and superstition which are unquestionably present in this field of experience, there is a very large residuum of fact, which rightly calls for scientific explanation. After all the results of trickery and sheer credulity have been removed, there still remains a great mass of hypnotic, telepathic, apparitional, and "mediumistic" phenomena which must be regarded as in some sense or other genuine. In other words, the Society

¹ See *Continuity*, page 103.

for Psychological Research has demonstrated that there is something more in this mystical field than mere deception and superstition. Something real is happening, and always has happened. The extraordinary nature of the events does not alter their reality. Many of these things at which we have been laughing all these years are *facts*, and must, in the name of truth, be treated as facts!

But do these facts, as Dr. Savage tells us he believes in his *Life Beyond Death*, "take us over the border and whisper in our ears the certainty of immortal life?"¹ Is it true that these facts can only be satisfactorily explained as communications from invisible intelligences, and thus constitute a scientific demonstration that death is not the end?

As regards the phenomena of apparitions, it is certain, to my mind, that they offer no proof of the survival of the dead. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the apparitions occur exactly as has been related in hundreds of instances, the very most that can be asserted is that these appearances demonstrate that one person can, by the intensity of his directed thought or spiritual desire, create a phantom of himself in the mind of another person over a great distance of space. There can be no doubt of this, says Professor Barrett, "unless we reject all testimony."² But

¹ See *Life Beyond Death*, the entire chapter on "The Society for Psychological Research and the Immortal Life," pages 245-70.

² See *Psychical Research*, page 113.

of anything more than this, there can, and must be, it seems to me, very grave doubt indeed. It is noticeable, for example, that in all the cases accepted as genuine, the apparitions have been projected at some critical moment in the lives of the persons seen, usually the moment of death. They convey no suggestion of the new "spiritual body" which they have presumably assumed, but reproduce always the familiar "natural body" which they have worn here upon earth. Still more, the phantasms appear for but a moment, and then fade away never to return. Is it not much more natural—and also scientific!—to assume, under such circumstances, that these appearances are to be explained as the momentary telepathic projection of the living person rather than as the terrestrial reappearance of the dead, especially as it has been proved that "normal hallucinations can be produced telepathically?" Is it not more reasonable to look upon these phantasms as the final glimmers of the old existence rather than as the first glimmers of the new?¹ If these apparitions appeared again and again for a considerable period after death, or if the apparitions of those long dead were ever seen or could be conjured up as the Witch of Endor conjured up the spirit of Samuel for King Saul, we might be able to argue that, in these phenomena, we had proof of immortality. But no such argument is now possible on the basis of these flitting phantasms

¹ See Maeterlinck's *Our Eternity*, page 86.

which fade almost as soon as they appear. On the contrary, if any evidence bearing upon the immortal life is to be gathered here at all, it would seem to be the unfavourable conclusion that spiritual energy survives death only momentarily and then lapses forever. All these inferences, however, both positive and negative, are scientifically inadmissible. Every phenomenon of apparitions can be satisfactorily explained by facts and conditions included well within the scope of our present existence. So long as this is possible, resort to the hypothesis of immortality is as irrational as it is unnecessary.

As regards the alleged communications from the dead, we face a different and much more difficult problem. And in discussing these phenomena, let it be said that we have reference exclusively to that higher class of verbal messages associated with the work of such a medium as Mrs. Piper. If these cannot give us the demonstration of immortality which we seek, surely no lower phenomena of this class can avail us anything.

Nobody can study the evidence gathered in this particular field without noticing, first of all, the triviality, almost the inanity, of the communications received. Here we come eager for evidence of the future life and information as to what it means to die and pass into the great beyond! And what do we get? First of all—and naturally enough, perhaps!—frantic endeavours on the part of the alleged spirits to prove their identity by the

citation of intricate and unimportant details of where they were and what they did at different times when they were here among men. Then the endless and tedious rehearsal of the various family connections of the individual or individuals interested in the communications—of the peculiarities, infirmities, and eccentricities of this, that, and the other person—of trivial and oftentimes silly episodes that have happened many years before and have long since been forgotten! Sometimes there is a recounting of an event which is taking place in a part of the world far removed from the locality in which the medium and recipient are sitting. Frequently there is a prophecy of something which is going to take place at some more or less distant moment in the future. Again and again, there is a descent to obscurity and feeble chattering. Even in the reported conversations with Myers and Hodgson there is the same perplexing and discouraging barrenness of revelation. Never do the communications rise to any sustained level of clear thought and fine feeling. Always is there an aggravating focussing of attention upon the affairs of this world instead of upon those of the world to come. Least of all is there any evidence of that range of vision, freedom of action, exaltation of experience, and general spiritualization of sentiment, which we may be pardoned for expecting to find in those who have thrown off the shackles of the flesh and been released into “the virgin reaches of space and

time." To an out-and-out unbeliever in psychic phenomena, like John Fiske, the triviality of these communications is an all-sufficient refutation of their claims.

If (their) value as evidence were to be conceded [he says], (they) would seem to point to the conclusion that the grade of intelligence which survives the grave is about on a par with that which in the present life we are accustomed to shut up in asylums for idiots. . . . (This) theory of things moves on so low a plane as hardly to merit notice in a serious philosophic discussion.¹

And even to such a wholly sympathetic student as Maurice Maeterlinck, these facts appear baffling if not absolutely inexplicable.

Of what use is it to die [he says], if all life's trivialities continue? Is it really worth while to have passed through the terrifying gorges which open on the eternal fields, in order to remember that we had a great uncle called Peter and that our cousin Paul was afflicted with varicose veins and gastric complaint? At that rate [he continues], I should choose for those whom I love the august and frozen solitudes of the everlasting nothing. . . . Without demanding a great miracle, we would nevertheless think we had the right to expect from a mind which nothing now enthralls some other discussion than that which it avoided when it was still subject to matter.²

¹ See *Life Everlasting*, page 60.

² See *Our Eternity*, pages 128-29.

Explanations of this strange characteristic of all alleged communications from the other world are by no means lacking on the part of those who believe in their credibility. Thus Professor Hyslop reminds us that in the very nature of the case, the communications received must partake of the detailed and trivial, since the main object of the messages is to convince the living of the identity of those who are speaking, and the proof of such identity always depends upon just such unimportant matters as these which trouble us.¹ The identification of a body rests upon a birth-mark, a scar, a broken finger, a ring, a lock of hair, an article of clothing. And so with the identification of those who have passed into the beyond and are now confronted with the task of making themselves known! Then we are asked to remember that the spirits are communicating through the mind of a medium, and it is impossible for them to transcend the narrow limits imposed by this particular person's mental apparatus and intellectual equipment. Just as

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,

so the medium stains with the darkening colours of her brain, the clear shaft of light which the living dead would send us. And then, too, we are besought to recognize the difficulty of an

¹ See the discussion of this subject in *Science and a Future Life*, page 300.

immortal being trying to explain to us poor creatures of space and time the conditions of a realm so alien to our experience as to be literally inconceivable! What words in our vocabulary shall the spirit use to describe the wonders of this immortal existence? What analogies shall he summon to set forth the things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the mind of man conceived?" Is not the situation, relatively speaking, exactly that of an adult who would explain to a child of four or five the propositions of Euclid, the categories of Kant, or the Unknowable of Herbert Spencer? And is not the communicating spirit, therefore, driven to talking to us about the trivial things which we, in our low estate, can understand, just as a mature person is driven to speaking to a child in words of one syllable and discussing with him the blocks and toys of the nursery? And yet, plausible as these explanations are, are they explanations which really explain! If the immortal life is to be demonstrated by the evidence contained in these "mediumistic" communications, must not the inadequacy of the material always remain a well-nigh insuperable obstacle to conviction?

Nay, is it not something more than an obstacle? Is it not a positive indication of what constitutes the real explanation, after all, of these baffling phenomena which we are considering? The real failure of the psychical researchers to prove their case for immortality is to be found in the fact that

at no time, in all their thirty years of investigation, have they succeeded in *isolating* spirit communication as the sole and only cause of that which they observe. In all scientific demonstrations of the relation of cause and effect, no phenomenon is accepted as the cause of any particular effect until all other possible causes have been shown to be impossible and this one therefore isolated and defined. Especially is this the case when these other possible causes are less remote in influence and less extraordinary in character than the one at last determined by the process of elimination. Uranus could not be postulated by Sir William Herschel as the cause of the extraordinary perturbation noted in the planet Saturn, until every other and especially nearer cause had been tested and disproved. Natural selection could not be put forward by Darwin as the sole explanation of evolution until he had not merely justified this process in itself, but also proved all other explanations, such as arbitrary creation or inheritance of acquired characteristics, to be impossible. The bite of one particular species of mosquito could not be accepted as the cause of yellow fever until experimenters had brought themselves into personal contact with yellow-fever patients, slept in yellow-fever beds, worn yellow-fever clothing, and proved that the contagion was not conveyed by such means.

Now it is just this isolating of spirit communication as the sole cause of psychic phenomena which

the researchers, whose work we have been discussing, have never succeeded in accomplishing. Right here at hand, within the borders of our present existence, is a spiritual force, which has already been shown to be the explanation of a thousand one-time mysteries of human experience, and which may well be the explanation of as many more that are still unveiled. I refer, of course, to the wondrous power of mind or personality. That the secrets of this psychological realm have not yet been plumbed to their deepest depths no group of persons has shown more conclusively than the psychical researchers themselves. It is they who have brought us face to face with the profound mysteries of personality, discovered the realities of hypnotism and suggestion, traced the possibilities of trances and dreams, taught us to accept the facts of thought-transference and telepathy. If the Society for Psychical Research has accomplished any one thing more positively than any other, it is the inability of the human mind to set any limits to the scope of its own capacity and influence. What we can or cannot do in the field of mental action no man today can say.

Now it is just this marvellous revelation of the indefinite potentialities of the human mind which has definitely prevented the psychical researchers, as I have said, from isolating spirit communication as the sole cause of psychic phenomena. At the present stage of investigation in this field, the telepathic hypothesis and the spiritual hypothesis

seem equally plausible as explanations of the exploits of the mediums—and this for the simple reason that we know nothing about either and can therefore imagine both with equal facility as the cause. But if this be the case, it is only the part of reason, is it not, to say nothing of scientific procedure, to have resort to that explanation which keeps us in the realm of the natural. In other words, we can never have resort to the supernatural and abnormal, until every nearer and more normal possibility has been exhausted. And it is just this which the psychical researchers have never done. Innumerable possibilities in our natural mental life still remain to be explored; and until the final exploration has been made in vain—or at least until the spirit world has given us evidence much more convincing than anything yet received—we must seek on this side of the grave, rather than on the other, for the causes and explanations. As Maeterlinck has so effectively put it, in his *Our Eternity*,

It is wise and necessary, before leaving the terrestrial plane, to exhaust all the suppositions, all the explanations, there to be discovered. We have to make our choice between two manifestations of the unknown, two miracles, if you prefer, whereof one is situated in the world which we inhabit and the other in a region which, rightly or wrongly, we believe to be separated from us by nameless spaces which no human being, alive or dead, has crossed to this day. It is natural that we should stay in our own world as long as it

gives us a foothold, or as long as we are not pitilessly expelled from it by a series of irresistible and irrefutable facts issuing from the adjoining abyss.¹

But I believe that we must go further! Not only is it more natural to seek the explanation of psychic phenomena in the mysterious reaches of human personality rather than in the mysterious realms of the future life, because of the general principles just indicated, but also because of the unquestionable fact that the former explanation fits the facts infinitely better than the latter. It is little short of ridiculous, in my opinion, to assert that immortality is the one fact which fits in as an adequate cause with the communications received through the mediums. On the contrary, it is the one fact which altogether fails to fit in with these communications. It is just here that the triviality of these messages takes on an altogether striking degree of importance. They are "of the earth, earthy." They contain not one suggestion of the unfettered spirit. They move from beginning to end in the material things of this present realm, in the petty experiences of living persons, in the transient circumstances of time and place, and never once in the sublime regions of eternal life. All of which means, if the relation of cause and effect has any significance, that these so-called communications originate on the plane of earth, and never on the plane of heaven. Given

¹ See *Our Eternity*, page 118.

a medium with mysterious subliminal faculties, given a sitter with innumerable memories beneath the threshold of consciousness, given the unfathomed possibilities of telepathic communications—and we have all the elements that we can need to explain any word that has ever been written or spoken by mediums.

If proof of immortality is ever to come in this field, it will be necessary that some communication shall be received from a person whose existence is unknown either to medium or percipient. No such case has ever been reported—nor, if it was, could it be verified. In this way only, however, could the infinitely nearer explanation of telepathic influence be eliminated, and the spiritistic hypothesis obtain that degree of isolation which can alone establish it as a scientific doctrine. F. W. H. Myers, than whom no man believed more confidently in spirit revelation, spoke the perfect refutation of his own conclusions and hopes, when he gave it as the result of his life-long studies in hypnotism, hallucinations, automatic writings, mediumship, etc.:

Each of us is in reality an abiding psychological entity far more extensive than he knows—an individuality which can never express itself completely through any corporeal manifestation. The self manifests itself through the organism; but there is always some part of the self unmanifested, and always, as it seems, some power of organic expression in abeyance or reserve.¹

¹ Quoted in James's *The Will to Believe*, page 316.

VII

What we have here, after all, in this whole attempt of the Society for Psychical Research to establish the spiritual world as the true cause of psychic phenomena, is the last survival of the old primitive habit of appealing to "the spirits" for the explanation of everything which was otherwise unaccountable. Among savages in the old days, as among ignorant and superstitious people today, every strange noise, every peculiar shadow, every unexpected night occurrence, every mysterious coincidence, is the work of ghosts! The human mind seems to be so constructed that it cannot rest till it finds a cause for all happenings. In ancient times, ascertainable causes were few, and therefore the spirits were omnipresent. As knowledge has increased, and especially as science has worked out step by step the intricate relations of phenomena, the spirits have retired more and more into the background, and natural forces more and more usurped their place. In our time, only this last mysterious realm of the mind has been left untouched—and behold! the spirits again appear! From this field, however, as from all others, they will disappear as knowledge grows and understanding deepens, and the last area of superstition will then at last be conquered. And when that conquest has been made, the Society for Psychical Research will be duly recorded as that group of persons which did more than all

others to explore the mysteries of personality and bring to light the facts of mental power. Columbus thought to reach India—and did the infinitely greater thing of discovering a new continent. The Society for Psychical Research thinks to reach the future life—and similarly does the infinitely greater thing of discoverng, and also exploring, a new continent of mind.

CHAPTER VI

THE PROOF OF IMMORTALITY

“Evidence on the question of immortality can scarcely be obtained by us by direct observation, by any method known to us, excepting in the usual way, —by death. But it is within the pale of scientific processes to employ legitimate inference from observed facts. That there are facts bearing on this question there can be no doubt, and that our knowledge of such facts will increase I have no doubt. Inference will then be likely to give some valuable results.”—Professor Edward D. Cope, in *Science and Immortality: A Symposium* (1887).

THE proof of immortality is not to be found in the field so exhaustively explored by the Society for Psychological Research. What, now, does this mean if not that the proof of immortality is nowhere to be found? If some of the best scientific minds, with the best scientific methods, have searched in vain, is it not inevitable that we should confess our failure, and make the best of it? Is not John Fiske right when he says, in his *Life Everlasting*, “that our notion of the survival of conscious activity apart from material conditions is not only unsupported by any evidence that can be gathered from the world of which we have

experience but is utterly and hopelessly inconceivable."¹ And this being the case, must we not content ourselves with finding consolation in Dr. Fiske's further declaration, already quoted in another connection, that this fact

not only fails to disprove the validity of the belief, but it does not raise even the slightest *prima facie* presumption against it. This will at once become apparent if we remember that human experience is very far indeed from being infinite, and that there are in all probability unseen regions of existence in every way as real as the region which we know, yet concerning which we cannot form the faintest rudiments of a conception.²

In other words, must we not abandon hope of scientific proof, and, recognizing the equal impossibility of disproof, place our reliance upon faith?

I

Let it be admitted frankly that, if we mean by proof the kind of inductive demonstration which is the commonplace of modern science, we must once for all surrender the idea of proving the reality of the immortal life. The Society for Psychical Research has done all that can be done in this direction, and in its failure must be seen the

¹ See *Life Everlasting*, page 58. See further—"This doctrine is not only destitute of scientific support, but lands us in inconceivabilities."

² *Ibid*, page. 62.

failure of all attempts at proof by induction from direct experience. "We must surrender at the start," says Dr. George A. Gordon, with sure insight, in his treatise on *Immortality and the New Theodicy*, "all hope of demonstration."¹ Nor, if we approach this problem from the right point of view, can we have ever expected anything else to be the case. The fact of the matter is, as should be evident even from a superficial consideration of the problem, and as must have become ever more and more evident in the course of our discussion, the life beyond the grave simply does not lie within the range of present conscious experience. Scientific proof of the inductive order, as we have seen, has to do with what can be experienced through the medium of our bodily senses. The astronomer can prove his laws of planetary motion because he can see the stars, watch their movements, time their progress, measure their distances, and mark the directions of their motion. The chemist can prove his laws of chemical affinity, because he can put the chemical elements in a test-tube and watch with his own eyes the resulting precipitation. The physicist can prove his laws of heat and light and electricity, because he can measure the volume of his steam, watch the refraction of his light rays, and test the power of his electric current. All of these phenomena, as has been said, form a part of conscious experience and therefore are susceptible of proof.

¹ See *Immortality and the New Theodicy*, page 4.

The immortal life, however, is by the very nature of its being beyond the conscious experience of this present life. It cannot be seen, heard, explored, and therefore its real existence cannot be proved.

It is entirely without foundation in experience [says John Fiske again, in his *Life Everlasting*]. Our powers of conception are narrowly determined by the limits of our experience, and when that experience has never furnished us with the materials for framing a conception, we simply cannot frame it.¹

All hope, therefore, of proving immortality, as the scientist proves his laws of physical phenomena, by actual experiment and verification in the realm of experience, must be forthwith abandoned. In spite of our psychical investigators, and their elaborate paraphernalia of tables, slates, and mediums, we must agree, in our present state of knowledge at least, with the dictum of Dr. Gordon that "we must surrender at the start all hope of demonstration."

But is this method of observation, experimentation, and induction the only kind of proof at our disposal? Is it true that we are face to face here with the alternative of taking refuge in blind, unreasoning faith as the ground for our belief in the immortal life, or else abandoning the belief altogether? Is it necessary for us either to agree with Dr. Fiske and Dr. Gordon that the scientific demonstration of immortality is impossible, or

¹ See *Life Everlasting*, page 6.

imitate the classic example of Tertullian, who was fond of saying of the doctrine of the Trinity, that he believed it because it was impossible of belief? On the contrary, is there not some middle ground between the two extremes of a "Q. E. D." conclusion upon the one hand and a groundless "credo" upon the other? Is there not some way of finding truth which has all the convincing power of the strict inductive method of the chemist, physicist, and astronomer, and yet lies outside of the narrow borders of actual sense impression?

II

One has only to familiarize himself with the actual practices of modern research, to understand that science, in its present methods of operation, employs two perfectly distinct, and yet equally convincing, methods of proof. The method of the astronomer who gazes at the wheeling stars, of the chemist who watches the test-tube precipitate, of the physicist who measures with nice exactitude his heat and light and electricity—the method based on actual sense impression and experience which fails so lamentably to meet the conditions imposed by the problem of immortality—has already been described. In addition to this method, there is to be noted another kind of scientific proof which may be said to demonstrate reality not by direct experience, but by inference from that which *is* experienced to that which cannot in the

nature of things be experienced. This kind of proof, the *proof of logical inference*, as it is called, must be described as just as valid and just as frequently employed by modern science, if we only realized it, as the other and better known kind of proof of which we have spoken at length; and it is this which I believe makes it possible for us to assert that the truth of the immortal life may be established by logical demonstration.

For example, all scientists believe today that the atmosphere is saturated with a certain material substance, which they have agreed to call "ether," so delicate that it is invisible to the eye and imperceptible to the touch. We cannot see this ether, nor hear it, nor touch it; it is beyond the range of the faculties which bring to us the content of our present conscious experience; and yet we know that it is there. And why? By the proof of inference. We know that ether is present in the atmosphere, for the impressive reason that the phenomenon of light, which we can see and feel in everyday experience, makes its existence a necessity. We know, that is, by actual experiment, that light moves in waves like the waves of the sea. This being established, the question at once arises—of what are these waves composed? Ocean waves are made of water, sound waves of air, and light waves—of what? They cannot be of air, or of water, or of any form of matter as we know it, for, to our senses, the atmosphere seems absolutely empty. And yet, the moving waves of light can-

not be waves of nothing! They must be waves of something—that is, of some material substance. And therefore do the scientists state, because of the observed motion of light, that they know that there exists in the atmosphere a substance, which is invisible, inaudible, intangible, and yet as real as anything that can be seen or heard or touched; and this substance they call “ether.” From corner to corner of this vast universe, that is, wherever a star shines or light darts, there broods this circumambient ether. The universe is soaked in it, as a sponge is soaked in water. It cannot be seen, touched, heard, or smelled—it is simply outside the possible range of sensory experience—and yet we know, by the *proof of inference*, that it exists. The phenomenon of light, which is visible, makes the reality of this ether, which is invisible, a rational certainty. No sane man thinks of doubting its existence because it cannot be demonstrated in experience, any more than he would think of doubting the existence of the sun.

Again, up to within a few years ago, it was believed by the chemists of the day, that matter could be ultimately analysed into some seventy odd elements which they could see and feel, and with which they could experiment—elements, that is, the existence of which they could demonstrate by the facts of actual experience. Within the last few years, however, it has been discovered, by means of certain experiments with heated gases, that further analysis is necessary; that these ele-

ments, in other words, are themselves resolvable into certain other elements still more basic in character. It is, of course, impossible to explain in this place the astonishing details of the new chemical investigations of our time. Sufficient is it to point out, that modern chemists have discovered the existence of one class of particles which they call ions, and another class which they call corpuscles; and that they have established the reality of these objects, in spite of the fact that, like ether, they are invisible and intangible, and therefore utterly beyond the range even of microscopic vision. These ions and corpuscles are unseen, and yet the chemists assert that they know that they exist. And they defend this assertion, with the utmost assurance, on the inferential ground that, if these elements did not exist, certain properties of known gases and substances, which are constantly under direct observation, were otherwise impossible. They explain, for instance, that a certain gas when heated, is discovered to possess the quality of conductivity; they explain that this quality could not appear if the gas were not composed of invisible corpuscles; and therefore they say, We know that the corpuscles must be really there, even though we can never hope to see them. That which lies beyond the range of possible experience, that is, we know to be a *reality* by necessary inference from the known to the unknown, from the visible to the invisible. And so absolutely is this inference

accepted as the equivalent of demonstration that no competent chemist would think today of doubting the real existence of ions and corpuscles, any more than he would think of doubting the reality of his own life.¹

Again, as still another illustration, there is no sane man today who does not accept as proved the truth of the uniformity of nature; and yet this truth, if established at all, is established by inference. Our experience would have to be as infinite as the cosmos and as eternal as time, in order to enable us to establish this doctrine by inductive demonstration. Suns rise and set, moons wax and wane, tides ebb and flow, seasons come and pass away, day and night follow each other in unbroken succession, and we conclude that this has been the unvarying order from the beginning and that it will continue to be the unvarying order to the end. And we declare confidently that this is proved—although, as a matter of fact, it is not and cannot in the very nature of things be demonstrated in actual experience—because human experience so far as it goes makes the reality of this tremendous conception necessary to the integrity of our thought. This universe is simply not understandable unless this great idea of the uniformity of

¹ Significant inductive confirmation of this method of proof is seen in the recent experiments of projecting the supposititious ions and corpuscles against a sensitive screen. Their existence is thus revealed in the same way that an invisible bullet is revealed by a splash as it falls into a distant body of water, or by a cloud of dust as it hits a distant spot of earth.

nature is accepted as everlastingly and universally true. It is only an inference, unsupported by the demonstration of experience, and yet the scientific world agrees to regard it as established.

And so we might go on, giving innumerable illustrations of what is meant by the proof of inference as contrasted with the proof of experience; but enough has been said, perhaps, to make clear the validity of this proof of inference as a basis of established truth. In each case, we have seen that certain facts known in experience, such as the movement of light in waves, or the conductivity of a heated gas, or the constantly recurring phenomena of day and night, have involved of necessity the reality of certain other facts unknown, and, in the nature of things, unknowable, in experience; and the scientists agree to accept these unknown and unknowable facts as proved by the method of logical inference. And it is these truths of inference, it should be added, and not at all the truths of actual experience, which constitute the very condition of all scientific progress. Were the scientist obliged to restrict his knowledge to the one proof of experience and accept nothing as real which he had not seen or touched or heard or measured or weighed or tested, then would scientific achievement be at an end. Then would the ether in the atmosphere be utterly unknown, and the phenomenon of light an inexplicable mystery. Then would ions and corpuscles remain hidden in darkness and the

miracles of modern chemistry be impossible. Then would this universe be interpreted as a realm of confusion, accident, chaos; and the great truth of the uniformity of nature as an idle speculation. Then would we know nothing beyond the infinitesimal area which is covered by the seeing of our eyes and the hearing of our ears!

But science, at least in modern times, has never been content to bind itself by the fetters of this restriction. On the contrary, science has advanced and truth has been established not by what men have actually proved through the medium of physical experience, but by what they have proved by inference, logic, faith. Ever have men launched boldly out into the unknown mysteries of time and space and matter. From the little which they have been able to experience, they have advanced to the great realities which have transcended experience. They have based their investigations upon the supposition that this universe is a harmony in all of its parts, and have agreed that, if the great things of which we dream, fit and supplement and harmonize with the little things which we actually know in our limited range of experience, then we have a right—a logical right—to accept these dreams as true. The ether in the atmosphere is a dream, the existence of the ions and corpuscles of the chemist was a dream until the shadows on the screen gave forth their revelations, the uniformity of nature must ever be a dream so long as man can compass only in

imagination the vast reaches of time and space—but these dreams fit the facts which we know in experience, and therefore may rightly be regarded as realities. The words of R. K. Duncan, late professor of chemistry in the University of Washington and Jefferson, in his book entitled, *The New Knowledge*, in interpretation of the wonders of the new chemistry of our time, are impressive. He tells of the marvellous discoveries of Thomson, Becquerel, Curie, Ramsay, and Crookes—discoveries regarding the properties and combination of atoms and molecules, which almost pass reasonable belief—and he concludes his treatise by asking if these speculations are true. And he answers by the proof of inference. These are his words:

If we have a beautiful building of systemized perceptions and conceptions all dovetailing into one another into the complete expression of an idea, we say that the idea is true (even though it passes all demonstration in experience), because we see in it a perfect harmony, and this harmony pleases us and gives us a feeling of the recognition of the truth. . . . It is an act of pure faith . . . but it is (this faith which is) bred in the very *bone* of science.¹

III

Such is the validity of the proof of inference—that proof which demonstrates reality not by di-

¹ See *The New Knowledge*, page 255. The entire concluding chapter in this book, entitled, "The Validity of the New Knowledge," should be read in this connection.

rect experience of visitation or communication, but by logical deduction from that which is experienced to that which is not, or cannot be, experienced—that proof upon which alone the greatest scientific discoveries of the last one hundred years or more repose, and which of itself alone makes possible all progressive, accumulating knowledge. And right here do I believe that we find that open road to the middle ground between agnosticism upon the one hand and blind credulity upon the other, for which we have been looking. Right here is our proof of immortality! For what have we been doing, in our discussion of the intimations of immortality and our consideration of the bearing of evolution upon the problem, but revealing facts which are themselves unexplainable except upon the hypothesis of continued existence, as the phenomena of light waves, for example, are unexplainable except upon the hypothesis of ether? What is all that we have affirmed up to the present point of our argument but the constituent parts of a scientific demonstration of our thesis?

Here, before our face and eyes, are the great facts of existence, which are so vital a part of our experience. Here is human life with its thoughts and aspirations and ideals, its struggles and battles and achievements, its disappointments and sufferings and agonies. Here is the biological story of the age-long evolution of the race from the first faint germ of protoplasmic life on the one side to

“Plato’s brain and the good Christ’s heart” upon the other—that story so full of the struggle of the animal with the material, of the human with the animal, of the divine with the human—that story of the slow rise from flesh into spirit, from body into soul, from the brute into the man, from the man into the conscious son of the living God! Here also is the historical story of the age-long struggle of the race for social prosperity, happiness, and peace; the struggle of race against race, of people against people, of nation against nation, for supremacy in commerce, government, and war; that story so aglow with the splendour of brave words spoken and heroic deeds performed—so sanctified by the holy names of seers and sages, of saints and prophets, of martyrs and heroes—so nobly stained by the tears of anguished love and the blood-drops of courageous sacrifice. Here is the story of human achievement in the realms of art, literature, and music; the evidence in the form of paintings, poems, and symphonies of the mighty thoughts that have surged in human brains and the overwhelming emotions that have throbbed in human hearts. Here, above all else, are the stories of the individual lives of men, women, and little children—the stories of joy and sorrow, of defeat and victory, of life and death; stories simple, humble, trivial, hidden away behind the walls of quiet, unknown homes, and yet stories which constitute the sum and substance of the fibre of human living. ✧

Here in a word are the facts of human life as we know these facts in experience; and in the light of these facts, can we not go so far as to affirm that, just as the facts of light proved the reality of the invisible "ether," just as the facts of a heated gas proved the reality of ions and corpuscles, just as the facts of ordered experience proved the universality of law, so these facts of human life prove the reality of the invisible life beyond the grave? The facts are alone understandable on the supposition of the reality of immortality. The only explanation of what lies beyond the grave that harmonizes, "fits in," with human life as we know it here and now, to use the test of truth just defined by Professor Duncan, is the explanation that "God created man to be immortal." Immortality, that is, like the greatest, deepest, and highest truths of modern science, is established by the proof of inference.

We know, say the scientists, that the ether in the atmosphere is a reality, even though it is beyond the reach of our experience, because the facts of light cannot be explained without it. So also, to my mind, do we know that the immortal life is a reality, even though, like the ether, it is beyond the reach of our conscious experience, because the facts of human life cannot be explained without it. We know, say the chemists, that the invisible ions and corpuscles are real, because the facts of the visible elements cannot be understood without them. So also do we know

that the invisible life beyond the grave is real, because the facts of this visible life cannot be understood without it. We know, say the scientists, that nature is not chaotic but uniform through all time and space, because all the known facts of human experience demand that hypothesis for their rational explanation. So also do we know that we are immortal because all the known facts of human life demand that hypothesis for their satisfactory explanation. The scientist, although he does not know in actual experience, has a right to accept as proved the reality of ether, the actuality of ions and corpuscles, and the truth of the uniformity of nature. And in exactly the same way, the theologian, although he does not know in actual experience, has a right to accept as proved the reality of the conception of immortality. All of these conceptions, scientific and theological, rest upon the same basis of inference from the known to the unknown, and all must stand or fall together. When Professor Duncan establishes the reality of the new chemical wonders of our time by stating that these ideas are true because they constitute a perfect harmony in our rational thought, he has given a test of truth which applies not only in the realm of science but also in the realm of metaphysics and theology; and he has proved the essential truth not only of the material speculations of the chemists, who have dreamed of ions and corpuscles, but also of the spiritual speculations of the poets, seers, and

prophets, who have dreamed of the life that is eternal.

IV

This now is what is meant by the proof of immortality—a proof which is as incontrovertible as any of those proofs upon which rest the vast superstructure of modern science and which nobody thinks of questioning—and this is what is meant by all who accept the doctrine of immortality as a demonstrated reality. It is this which explains Dr. Gordon's apparently contradictory position, when he opens his book on *Immortality and the New Theodicy* with the categorical statement that we "must surrender at the outset all hope of demonstration," and closes it with the equally categorical affirmation that the human reason registers its decree in favour of the immortality of man. It is this which explains John Fiske's peculiar attitude. He states emphatically, in his *Life Everlasting*, as I have pointed out, that the conception of immortality is unsupported by proof and is utterly inconceivable. And yet he states, with even greater emphasis, in his *Destiny of Man*, his personal confession already quoted, "I believe in the immortality of the soul as a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God's work." It is this conception of proof which James Martineau had in mind when he made that marvellously illuminating statement that we do not believe in

immortality because it can be demonstrated in experience, but are always trying to demonstrate it because we must believe it. The conception of immortality is true, in the same way that all the greater conceptions of modern science are true—because the integrity of the human mind, and the rationality of human experience, make necessary its reality.

Is it not cause for genuine wonder that those very persons, who make the greatest pretensions to being guided by their reason and who pretend to place the most implicit reliance upon the methods of science, are oftentimes the very ones who fail to see that this reason, by which they are guided, and these scientific methods, of which they boast, lead inevitably to immortality as a demonstrated reality? Is it too much to say, that the time has gone by for speaking of the eternal life as a hope, a faith, a probability, a dream of the poets, a vision of the prophets? Has not the time come for declaring that the eternal life is a demonstrated certainty? If not, this at least can be unhesitatingly affirmed—that if immortality is nothing but a hope, a probability, a dream, then is the vast and splendid structure of modern science, which no sane man thinks of questioning, nothing but a hope, a probability, a dream. The two things stand or fall together. It is all, or none!

Again I resort to parable for the clinching of my argument! A few years ago, before the chemical section of the British Association, a notable address

was delivered by Professor Ramsay, the world-famous scientist. He opened his speech upon this particular occasion with these words:

The subject of my remarks today is a new gas. I shall describe to you later its peculiar properties, but it would be unfair not to put you at once into possession of the knowledge of its most remarkable property, which is this—*it has not yet been discovered.*

Is not this an exact parallel of our position? The immortal life has not been discovered! But we know, even as Professor Ramsay knew of his wonderful gas, and by exactly the same process of demonstration, that it exists!

CHAPTER VII

CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY

"We have no other principle for deciding the question than this general idealistic belief: that every created thing will continue whose continuance belongs to the meaning of the world, and so long as it does so belong; whilst every one will pass away whose reality is justified only in a transitory phase of the world's course. That this principle admits of no further application in human hands need hardly be said. We surely know not the merits which may give to one being a claim on eternity, nor the defects which would cut others off."—Rudolph Hermann Lotze, in *Metaphysics*, Section 245.

IT is altogether probable that, in our search for a demonstration of the reality of the immortal life, we shall never be able to go beyond the limits set by this proof of inference. As there seem to be heights to which man cannot climb or soar, and depths to which he cannot sink, so there would seem to be realms of mystery into which he cannot enter. Of course it is possible that he may some day tear aside the veil that hides the future from the present, just as it is possible that he may some day develop an instrument delicate enough to handle and measure ether, or an atmosphere light enough to isolate and make visible Professor

Ramsay's peculiar gas. So also is it not inconceivable that Omar Khayyam's exclamation—

Strange, is it not? that of the myriads who
Before us passed the door of Darkness through
Not one returns to tell us of the road,
Which to discover we must travel too—

may some day be made ridiculous by the actual return of some "traveller" from the eternal "bourne," bearing credentials that are beyond dispute. August Comte's pathetic experience with spectrum analysis is a classic illustration of the folly of attempting to place impassable barriers about the field of human achievement. But it is certainly improbable, at the very least, that any one of these things should happen, either now or in the distant future. Nor do I see any reason why we should wish for such consummations. The frantic endeavours of some of our psychical researchers seem almost as ridiculous as the stupid endeavours of Dr. Watson to find evidence, after Sherlock Holmes had discovered and catalogued the facts which made everything as clear as day to his discerning mind! Why ask for better proof of immortality than this which is in our possession at this present moment. The physicist does not let his experiments with light wait upon the visualizing of his postulated ether. The chemist does not hamper his activity with doubts as to the existence of ions and corpuscles. No one of us worries at night as to whether the sun will rise

tomorrow as it has been doing every morning hitherto for unnumbered millions of years. We simply take these things for granted, although no one of them is verified in certain experience, and act accordingly. And we have every good reason for doing the same thing with this question of the life to come. To ask for further evidence than we already have is to ask for what any scientist would think it absurd to demand. It is simply irrational to expect that belief shall wait upon final experience. What is reason, but the faculty which lays hold on such facts as can actually be apprehended, and shows us their larger implications in fields beyond our ken? What is evidence, but the divining-rod which points unerringly to "things not seen?" Every highest truth is an inference; every deepest principle a rational hypothesis; every noblest vision an affirmation of faith. If we need more knowledge here before belief is possible, we need more knowledge everywhere, and all the great fabric of our sciences and philosophies comes tumbling to the ground. To accept the doctrine of immortality is not to believe in spite of facts; it is to believe because of facts. Not the believer, but the doubter and denier, is the man who is guilty of unreason.

I

We may safely assume, therefore, as reasonable beings, that the immortal life is a reality. This conclusion, reassuring as it is, however, comes far

from bringing us to the end of our inquiry. At this point, for example, there arises the highly important question as to whether immortality is universal. Is it a reality for all men born into the world, without discrimination, or for only a selected few? Is it a natural or an acquired characteristic? Is it an inheritance upon which men enter, or a prize which they are challenged to win? In short, to use the technical phrases of our day, is the immortal life to be regarded as absolute or conditional?

In its present definite form, at least, this question is of strictly modern origin. In the past, however, there has always been a more or less close approximation to the conception of a conditional immortality.

Thus in the old pagan days, we have what may be described as the aristocratic view of the immortal life. According to this idea, immortality, as a state of continued and glorified existence, was the happy fate reserved for kings and heroes, and those immediately associated with them. All the rest of mankind constituted an inconglomerate mass of beings who were consigned to a great pit beneath the earth, where they were not actually annihilated, but doomed to a condition so close to extinction that they could hardly be said to live at all. Certainly there was nothing in their existence which even remotely suggests what we now mean by immortality. In some places, to be sure, as in ancient Israel, even "the chief ones of the

earth" were made to share this hapless lot, as witness the stupendous scene in *Isaiah*¹, where "all the kings of the nations" are made to rise "up from their thrones" and greet the newcomer with the words, "Art thou also become as weak as we?" But the more frequent idea is that which comes to us from ancient Greece, wherein the great ones, especially the blameless heroes, are sent to the so-called Islands of the Blest, where the eternal favours of the gods are showered upon them like "the gentle dew from heaven," and all the rest of mankind, including even such unfortunate chieftains as Agamemnon and Achilles, are condemned to this miserable half-existence in the underworld. The most vivid picture which has been preserved to us of this unhappy realm, is that contained in the eleventh book of Homer's *Odyssey*, where is described the visit of Ulysses to the dark abode of Hades. Here do we see the myriads of pale and empty shades, wandering about heedless and incoherent, "like the leaves that fall in the autumn, trembling in the unknown winds from the vast plains of the other world." They exist, and yet are so close to extinction, that when the wandering Ithacan sacrifices his sheep upon the altars, the "airy shoals of visionary ghosts" leap at the "streaming blood" that they may drink some life into their empty veins. Hailed as "king in these abodes," the great Achilles dolefully replies:

¹ *Isaiah* xiv: 9-10.

Talk not of seeking in this dolorous gloom,
Nor think vain words . . . can ease my doom.¹
Rather I choose laboriously to bear
A weight of woes, and breathe the vital air,
A slave to some poor hind that toils for bread,
Than reign the sceptred monarch of the dead.¹

A similar picture is given us by Mr. Stephen Phillips in the second act of his drama, *Ulysses*. It is with a true understanding of the Grecian myth that he represents his hero as always referring to the departed as "the dead! the dead!"—and these in turn as crying enviously unto him, "Thou, thou, hast life in thee, and flesh and blood!" Here surely is no immortality! This boon is reserved only for the favoured few who journey westward to the happy isles!

Later on, in the days of the Mysteries, this peculiar aristocratic conception of a conditional immortality was superseded by a division between "the sheep and the goats" on the basis of ethical distinction. For the full development of this idea, however, we must turn to later Israel, when the Persian doctrines of the future had mastered the Hebrew mind, or, still better, to the matured theological dogmas of Catholic and Protestant Christianity. Immortality, in the true sense of the word, is here confined to those who are able to attain to certain exalted standards of moral worth or meet certain rigorous conditions of spiritual salvation. Sometimes it is asserted that

¹ Alexander Pope's translation.

eternal life is conferred upon all who have clean hands and pure hearts, and manifest love for their fellow-men. Such seems to be the idea of the Psalmist when he describes those "who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord," and "stand in his holy place";¹ and the idea of Jesus, also, when he describes the Judgment Scene, and still further when he answers the inquiry of the rich young man as to what he shall "do to inherit eternal life."² More often, immortality is to be won only by open repentance for past sins, and a new birth of consecration to the divine ideals. In its finest flowering, as in the Eleusinian mysteries, for example, and especially in the highly elaborated systems of Christendom, this idea develops into intricate systems of purification and atonement with the immortal life as a goal upon a prolonged "way of salvation." But whatever the particular moral or spiritual conditions imposed, the practical outcome is always the same. Those who are so happy as to be able to meet these conditions, are admitted into heaven, which is always described as a place of ineffable splendour and unending bliss. All the rest of mankind—and this includes of course the vast majority who are altogether outside the magic charm of the true salvation—are doomed to endless torment in the nether world. In the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, with its highly wrought picture of the circles of *Inferno* at one end as the abode of the lost, and the lofty pinnacles of

¹ See *Psalm* xxiv: 3.

² See *Matthew* xxv: 31, and xix: 16.

Paradiso at the other end as the home of the angels and the saints, and in between the ridges of *Purgatorio* where toil and suffer those who are being disciplined for the blessed life of heaven, we have what must be described as the final statement of this particular conception of the future. Of course, in so far as the mere fact of continued existence is concerned, those who agonize in the depths of hell are just as much immortal as those who revel in the joys of heaven. Not even in the case of Dante's vilest sinners—the infamous traitors to their lords and benefactors, Lucifer, Judas, Brutus and Cassius, who are held in the monstrous bond of the lowest circle of *Inferno*—is there even a suggestion of annihilation! But certainly in such continued existence as this, there is nothing of what we mean by immortality. To be doomed to serve as unconsumed fuel for the fires of hell is hardly life eternal.¹ In this case, exactly as in that of paganism, immortality strictly speaking is the exclusive possession of those who have met the spiritual conditions of salvation. That is to say, we have in both cases a frankly conditional interpretation of immortality. The only change here is to be found in the great gain which is registered by the substitution of a moral for a purely social basis of distinction, in the admission of the good rather than the great to heaven!

¹ See William James's *Human Immortality*, page 32. "The immortals—I speak of heaven exclusively, for an immortality of torment need not now concern us."

II

For reasons, now, which are so familiar that I need do little more than merely indicate them, all such ideas as these of a conditional immortality have long since been outgrown.

Thus, in the first place, it is evident, is it not, that these materialistic conceptions of the future world, with their pits and flames and ridges and mountain-tops, have no place whatsoever in modern thought. They are on the face of things fantastic—the obvious creation of man's fertile and ingenious imagination! Does hell, for example, as pictured by Zoroaster, Tertullian, Augustine, Dante, Milton, Calvin, Edwards, really exist? Is it not a thousand times easier to believe that Sinbad sailed his seven voyages, that Jason found the golden fleece, that Æneas builded Rome, than that the Hades of the Greeks, the Gehenna of the Jews, or the Hell of the Christians, is a reality? Nothing could be more realistic than Dante's picture of the Inferno, and yet we take but a single step with him and Virgil beyond the threshold of this nether realm, when we know that all these things are but

. . . the children of an idle brain
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy.

More important than any such crude consideration as this, however, are the changed ideas

which have made intolerable this eternal division of mankind into the two classes of the saved and lost. The aristocratic view of immortality, so characteristic of the pagan world, was of course overthrown once for all by the sweeping democracy of the Christian gospel. Jesus calling fishermen and publicans to his band of disciples—Paul describing the slave Onesimus as his “son” and beseeching the master, Philemon, to receive back his bondman “not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved”—St. Ambrose refusing Theodosius the Great admission to his church until the Emperor has repented and atoned for his sins—St. Francis crowning with his redemptive love the poorest of earth’s inhabitants—Savonarola denying absolution to Lorenzo the Magnificent excepting on his own spiritual terms—Luther proclaiming against the Pope and Emperor “the priesthood of the common man”—the English Independents asserting the essential freedom of the children of God—Wesley taking appeal from princes and archbishops to the miners of Litchfield—these are but a few of the more glorious episodes in the history of Christianity which illustrate the essential democracy of the movement. Here there are no high nor low, rich nor poor, master nor slave, king nor subject! All, even “unto the least,” are children of God, brothers in Christ! “He hath put down the mighty from their seats,” sang Mary, “and exalted them of low degree.” This is the real spirit which animated Jesus at the

beginning, and the spirit which has led his apostles and prophets down to our own day. Hence the impossibility of conceiving that the immortal life was conditioned upon anything which even remotely reflected the class or caste distinctions of human society! If there were any distinctions, they must be moral and not social. The lowest and weakest must have an equal chance for salvation with the highest and greatest, and heaven therefore be opened freely to all who spiritually attain.

This marks a great gain, as I have indicated. But today we are finding the Christian conception of conditional immortality well-nigh as intolerable as the pagan.

In the first place, this basic thought of eternal punishment, as the fate of the wicked, is inconsistent with our modern idea of God. So long as God was conceived of as a great ruler or sovereign, so long was the idea of hell compatible with the thought of the Most High. Just as any earthly monarch, ruling the destinies of his earthly kingdom, has his prisons where rebellious subjects may be punished for their crimes against his sovereignty, so it was at least not impossible to believe that God had his chambers of retribution, where he condemns to torment all those of his subjects who give allegiance to Satan rather than to himself. This idea of the sovereignty of God reached its culmination in the teachings of Calvin, and therefore is it perfectly logical that the doc-

trine of eternal punishment should reach its culmination also in the writings of this same great theologian.

Now-a-days, however, we have come to think of God not as a sovereign ruling his subjects, but as a father guiding his children. We have returned in this, as in so many other matters, to the long-lost gospel of the Nazarene. And from this point of view, the whole conception of hell and its everlasting torments becomes irreconcilable with our thought of the Divine. Surely if God is "our Father," he must embody all of those spiritual attributes which we instinctively associate with fatherhood—namely, tenderness, compassion, sympathy, forgiveness, love. And surely, if this is the case, he cannot be conceived of, even in the wildest stretches of the imagination, as dooming any of his children, even the most wicked, to unending pain in punishment of their offences. The thought is simply madness, for God must be at least as merciful as a human being, and no earthly father would for a moment decree such torment for his child. We shudder instinctively as we follow Dante down the successive circles of *Inferno* and read of his tearful pity for the sufferers whom he meets—and for no other reason than that we find the Florentine to be more merciful than God! So also do we shudder as we read the story of the murder of the princes in the Tower by their malignant uncle, Richard III; we stand aghast at the slaughter of Don Carlos by his unnatural

father, Philip II; we are chilled to the heart at the spectacle of Czar Ivan the Terrible slaying his son in a fit of vengeful passion. But what one of these crimes begins to compare in cruelty with the dispatch into the nameless tortures of hell of one lone child of God, to say nothing of the unnumbered myriads of the ages past, who are reported to have gone that way?

And if this act is cruel, what shall we say, in the second place, as to its justice? Are we not at this moment experiencing a radical transformation of all our views upon the problem of punishment for crime? Are we not more and more coming to the point of agreeing that punishment, in the last analysis, should be redemptive in character and not retributive? Are we not slowly convincing ourselves that even the most confirmed offender can be restored to decent manhood if his punishment be but wisely adapted to the past occasions of his downfall and the present state of his moral being? Are we not asserting that ordinary justice demands that we shall save our criminals by throwing about them the redemptive influences of good environment, human comradeship, moral training and spiritual uplift? And are we not just now putting ourselves to the prodigious task of so reforming our system of legal punishment, that a man shall enter a prison as he does a hospital—not to be tortured or gotten rid of, but to be healed, strengthened, and restored to normal life? And are not all these changes in idea and effort just as much a con-

demnation of Christianity's doctrine of eternal punishment as of society's doctrine of penology? What, indeed, have men been doing with their criminals but following God's alleged practice with his sinners? And if they now find themselves under indictment for injustice to offenders, must they not also find God guilty of the same fault? The parallel is perfect. Hence the growing conviction of our time that eternal punishment has no place in the world that is to come!

The last blow at this traditional idea of conditional immortality was struck by what may be termed the new humanitarianism of our age. More and more today is our race becoming one in the community of suffering. More and more are men and women finding it difficult to be happy themselves, when they know that others are suffering from pain, privation, or misfortune. The rich man can no longer enjoy his wealth, or the ordinary man even his decent comfort, when he knows that Lazarus is dying of hunger at his gate. Americans can no longer enjoy their independence, when they know that the people of the Czar are the helpless victims of a tyrannous autocracy. The persecution of Armenians in Turkey, the oppression of Jews in Russia, the exploitation of labour everywhere—these iniquities awaken men to pity and arouse them to unrest. The race is one in suffering. Wherever there sounds the cry of weakness and pain, there speeds the succour of humanity. And just here, in this new humani-

tarianism, as we call it, do we see the overthrow of the last remnant of the Christian doctrine of the future life. For if it is impossible for men upon the earth to be happy when their fellows in some remote corner of the globe are in distress, how can we conceive of these same men being happy in heaven when their fellows are similarly suffering in hell? I for one cannot conceive of hell being so far separated from heaven, that the horrors of the one would not disturb the tranquillity of the other. The story of the saint of old, who was assured that his life of devotion had won him rest and peace in heaven, and, instead of offering thanks to God for this sweet reward, prayed that he might be permitted to go to hell and there help to alleviate the sufferings of the damned, is typical of our day and generation rather than of his own. The modern man has no desire for heaven so long as hell exists. In other words, he refuses to accept the boon of immortality under the conditions named.

III

It is such considerations as these which have led to the general acceptance in our day of the doctrine of universalism. There have been Christian teachers in all ages who have held to this conviction—as witness Origen, the greatest theologian of the early Church, Scotus Erigena in the Middle Ages, and more lately such liberal leaders

as William Ellery Channing, Hosea Ballou, and Theodore Parker. The Church as a whole, however, has ever rejected it and denounced these teachers, for this reason among others, as heretics. But today the tide has turned. The whole conception of eternal punishment is tumbling to pieces; hell is fast disappearing from the modern pulpit; universalism seems to be very far upon the way of general acceptance by the entire Christian world.

At this very time, however, when universalism seems to be winning all along the line, there has appeared a new theory of conditional immortality, which surpasses in definiteness anything that previous thought, in either pagan or Christian times, can show. This modern doctrine, indeed, is the only one to which, strictly speaking, we have any right to apply the phrase "conditional immortality." For here we are offered, in uncompromising fashion, not a division of mankind into those who are to meet in heaven and those who are to depart into hell, but a division into those who are to inherit eternal life and those who are to be extinguished. It is the out-and-out distinction, in other words, between immortality and annihilation—and thus a doctrine of immortality which is in the literal sense of the word conditional. For the first time in human thought, we are today face to face with the serious contention that immortality is not a natural inheritance of all men, but is a prize which may be won under conditions. The

prize is open to all, to be sure, but universalism ends with this one fact of opportunity!

The rise of this conception of conditional immortality, has been primarily occasioned by the difficulties which have always been inherent in the theory of universalism itself. These difficulties, however, have been greatly exaggerated and enlarged, in our time, by certain startling implications of the great doctrine of evolution.

At bottom, of course, is the difficulty of conceiving the mere physical possibility of granting immortality to every human being whatsoever. Without raising questions as to moral desert, there still remains the perplexing problem as to how persons who are so different in this world can enter upon the same kind of spiritual existence in the world to come? Must there not inevitably be some kind of distinction or at least grading between various groups, and must not such distinction or grading at last bring us to the point of cutting out some people altogether? Is not annihilation, indeed, written all over the lives of whole masses of human beings?

Take, for example, the feeble-minded, the imbecile, the idiotic, the insane, who are to be numbered the world around by the millions. Go into the refuges and asylums where the worst of these wretched beings are confined! See the beastly practices of which they are guilty, the hideous illusions of which they are the victims, the utter loss which they have suffered of every

mental and spiritual attribute which binds them to humanity! In so far as they can be classified at all, these wretches must be described as human beings. The very fact that we do not kill them outright and thus put them out of their misery, as we would animals in a like condition, proves that we believe them to be in some sense human. And yet, were it not for their forms and features, we should never imagine that they were men. Every other vestige of their origin has disappeared. In all the functions that relate to life, they are simply animals—nay, worse than animals, for all that attraction and beauty which move such a poet as Walt Whitman to declare that he “could go and live with animals,” is here supplanted by the loathsome and the ugly. Surely these unfortunates are not destined to enter upon eternal life. Where are the souls which are to survive the wreckage of the flesh? Death must be the end in cases such as these, else is the whole doctrine of immortality made ridiculous!

Raised only a little above these miserable beings are the vicious and depraved—the criminals who prey upon property and life, the prostitutes who infest the darkened streets of cities, the “bad men” and “bad women” who constitute a perfectly distinct group in every ordered society. These persons, unlike the feeble-minded and insane, retain a full degree of self-consciousness, frequently have a high degree of understanding, and reveal in distorted loyalties and

instinctive kindnesses, certain rudiments of moral sense. And yet those high attributes of spirituality which really distinguish man from the brute creature have disappeared, if indeed they were ever present in these wicked lives. Immortality must surely be morally conditioned! It must be a life of the free spirit, if it is anything at all! And if this be the case, it necessarily follows, does it not, that all such creatures as these must be excluded from its blessing. Surely the murderer cannot enter upon the same destiny as his innocent victim! The hardened prostitute must be forbidden sharing a like fate with the pure wife and saintly mother! It cannot be that Herod and Pilate mount, with Jesus, to eternal life! And if there be no hell to which to consign these offenders, what solution of the problem is left save that of annihilation?

And what shall we say about the vast host of benighted and half-human creatures which swarm like flies in all portions of the earth? The Hottentots, the Fiji Islanders, the Australian bushmen, the African blackmen, the teeming hordes of India, the brooding millions of China—is it possible that these share the immortality which we believe to be our destiny? And if so, does not the fact of the eternal life begin to expand to proportions which come perilously near to passing the bounds of credibility? The peoples of the ancient world were never bothered by this problem, as the question of immortality was taken to involve only

their own fellow-countrymen. The sharp distinction between Jew and Gentile, Greek and Barbarian, carried over nicely from this world to the next! Our Christian forefathers also found an easy escape from the dilemma by regarding all foreigners as "heathen," and virtuously consigning them to a pit of fire which was conveniently described as "bottomless." We have of course got humanized far beyond this point today. We feel our kinship with even the lowest and most alien of men. But still we cannot seem to carry over the thought of the necessary survival of these people into the vast reaches of eternity. We fail to see any spiritual value in them. We have little use for them as men, and do not see what possible use God himself can have for them. "It oppresses us," says William James, discussing this subject in his *Human Immortality*, "to think of their survival." What fitness is there

in their eternal perpetuation unreduced in numbers? . . . Life is a good thing on a reasonably copious scale; but the very heavens themselves, and the cosmic times and spaces, would stand aghast, we think, at the notion of preserving eternally such an ever-swelling plethora and glut of it. . . . We give up our own immortality sooner than believe that all the hosts of Hottentots and Australians that have been, and ever shall be, should share it with us *in sæcula sæculorum!*¹

Nor is this the end of our difficulty. On the

¹ See *Human Immortality*, pages 31-36.

contrary, it remained for the doctrine of evolution to put the cap-stone on this block of stumbling by so widening the vista of human history as to multiply immeasurably the hordes of candidates for immortality. Our ancestors looked back upon a history which was "a comparatively snug affair."¹ Six thousand years was the limit of its span. To-day, however, we are carried back, in the cosmic sweep of the evolution theory, to ages so remote that it is difficult to measure the intervening distance even by the unit of centuries. For millions of years man has been living here upon the earth. He goes back without question to the tertiary period, and it is no longer unreasonable to suspect that his origin as a human antedates even this dim epoch of cosmic history. And during all this stupendous period, let it be noted, he has been a man and not an animal, although to look upon him, and study the habits of his primitive life, we should never imagine him to be akin to ourselves, his lineal descendants. What now about immortality for this creature? See him as he wanders through the primeval forests, unclothed and hairy like the ape—long-armed, huge-handed, sabre-toothed—wielding as his only weapon a broken stick or a handy stone—inhabiting caves of the earth or rough bowers in the trees—mumbling the rude jargon of unfashioned speech—hunting, fighting, tearing at raw flesh, mating fiercely with his female, trembling at storm and flood,

¹ See *Human Immortality*, page 31.

dying horribly at last in fierce combat with some wild beast of his habitat! Is this creature, and the unnumbered billions like him who came before and followed after, to be included within the scope of life eternal? Is it reasonable to suppose that these myriad hordes of savage humans, whose bones now form the very texture of our earth, are immortal like ourselves—that that poor creature, whose flat and ugly skull was dug up but yesterday in the clay pits of Dartmoor, England, is now an immortal spirit? Or is it reasonable to suppose that immortality, like the spiritual attributes of which it is the ultimate fulfilment, is something attained, by slow accretion and long struggle, in the comparatively late stages of human development? In other words, is it not practically certain that immortality is conditional, at least to the extent that it has been entered upon only by what may be regarded as the highest and truest species of human-kind?

This conclusion seems certain, as regards not only our barbaric ancestors, but also the other groups of human beings which I have described, when we remember that evolution explains all life as fundamentally determined by the process of “natural selection” or “survival of the fittest.” According to this conception, which is no longer in dispute among scientific men, nature exercises a choice, through the indirect medium of the relation between a living organism and its environment, as to the species, and the individuals of each species,

which shall survive and reproduce their kind. All life is to be regarded as a struggle, in which the majority of animal forms perish and the chosen few only attain. Persistently, by this method of sorting the fit from the unfit, has nature pushed onward and upward toward her goals, until today she points to man as the proudest achievement of her handiwork. Behind is the vast wreckage of the thousands of species which have appeared upon the earth only to disappear, and the billions of individuals in each particular species which have similarly disappeared. The remnant survives, and by its perfection of development justifies the ruthless process of selection.

Now the meaning of all this for our thought of the life after death would seem to be obvious. The same principle of natural selection which is operative in the physical realm is operative also in the spiritual. Man has only lately, in the evolutionary process, developed an immortal soul, just as he developed at only a slightly earlier period an upright carriage and an ordered speech. Previous to this most wonderful of all moments in cosmic history, he perished like the veriest beasts of the field. Now, however, every man comes into the world with the capacity for immortal life. But whether that capacity shall be realized or not, depends in each case upon the individual and his power of adaptation to the new spiritual environment into which he has been born. There is the struggle, in other words, for the survival of the

soul, just as in the lower physical realm there is the struggle for the survival of the body. And in the one case as in the other, only the fittest can survive! The vast majority of men never attempt to live on the high level of things spiritual. They gladly surrender to the lusts of the flesh, and live for no nobler purpose than the perpetual gratification of their selfish appetites and brutal passions. For such, of course, there can be no immortality. They will perish utterly when perishes the flesh in the environment of which they have deliberately chosen to pass their days. More literally than even he himself imagined did Paul speak the truth when he said, "The wages of sin are death." With those, however, who have cultivated the fruits of the spirit, it shall be otherwise. These are they who shall survive the dying of the flesh, for the simple reason that the principle of the survival of the fittest is just as much in control here as elsewhere. "Delivered from the body of this death" even before the moment of their physical dissolution, by their exclusive devotion to the high and noble things of life, they enter upon immortality as naturally as day passes into day. "Now are (they) the children of God"; and therefore is it inevitable that, in the future, they shall "be like Him."

Such is the modern theory of conditional immortality! Rooted in the difficulties inherent in the idea of universalism, it finds its special cogency in our time in certain implications involved in the

evolutionary interpretation of life. In its present form, as in its ancient forms, it is fundamentally an attempt to meet the fact of the apparent worthlessness of the greater part of human life, which constitutes the chief argument against immortality.¹ In essence, it finds its answer to this problem in the rigorous declaration that it is only the worthy who can hope to live forever; all others must perish utterly at death.

IV

And what now shall be said of this attempt to limit in this fashion the scope of the immortal life?

First of all, it must be admitted that this conception of conditional immortality, as thus stated, presents very apparent advantages to the thoughtful mind. It undoubtedly meets the inherent objections to the doctrine of universalism. It has the unquestioned merit of carrying over into the spiritual realm the same principle of unfolding life that has been uncovered in the physical realm, and thus of affirming by the recognition of "one law for nature and for grace" the essential unity of the cosmos. It restores to our faith in immortality its necessary moral and religious content, which was seemingly threatened by universal-

¹ See William Adams Brown's *The Christian Hope*, page 191: "As the chief argument against immortality is the apparent worthlessness of human life as we know it, so the chief argument for immortality is the existence of men and women who deserve it."

ism, and at the same time avoids the awful horror of an eternity, not only of suffering, but of sin. Above all it provides the only clear, straightforward statement that we have had in modern terms of the traditional Christian doctrine that the one ground for hope of immortality is the Christ life. Is it not true that what we have here, after all, is nothing more nor less than a twentieth-century philosophical statement of the ancient theological dictum of St. Paul, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive"?¹

v

In spite of these excellencies, however, this theory of conditional immortality is not without its difficulties. And the more carefully these difficulties are considered, the more insuperable do they seem to become.

First of all, we must be impressed by the fact that the doom pronounced upon those who fail to measure up to the spiritual standards of eternal life is the most terrible imaginable—namely, annihilation! The melancholy corridors of the underworld of the Greeks were pitiful enough. The perpetual fires of the Christian hell seemed an unsurpassable refinement of cruelty. But worse than either of these two is this last fate of all—destruction! The Grecian shades were at least not robbed of consciousness and were even granted

¹ See I *Corinthians* xv: 22

the inestimable boon of memory; and when summoned by some such denizen of the upper world as Ulysses could hold sweet converse with the living. The damned of Christendom, terrible as was their lot, were still not utterly condemned, for they were still themselves, and by sheer power of spirit could defy the utmost agonies of torture. This Shelley suggests, in the opening act of his *Prometheus Unbound*, where he pictures his hero

Nailed to the wall of eagle-baffling mountain,
Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured . . .

writhing in "pain, pain ever, forever," and yet defying Jupiter to conquer him.

There thousand years of sleep, unsheltered hours,
And moments age divided by keen pangs
Till they seemed years, torture and solitude,
Scorn and despair,—these are mine empire:—
More glorious than that which thou surveyest
From thine unenvied throne, O Mighty God!

Similar is the note struck by Stephen Phillips in Paolo's glorious speech in the last act of the *Paolo and Francesca*:

What can we fear, we two?
O God, thou seest us thy creatures bound
Together by that law which holds the stars
In palpitating cosmic passion bright.

Us, then, whose only pain can be to part,
How wilt thou punish? For what ecstasy

Together to be blown about the globe!
What rapture in perpetual fire to burn
Together!—where we are is endless fire.
These centuries shall in a moment pass,
And all the cycles in one hour elapse!
Still, still together, even when faints thy sun,
And past our souls thy stars like ashes fall,
How wilt thou punish us who cannot part?¹

In this theory of conditional immortality, however, not even these last remnants of consolation are left. Everything is absolutely and irrevocably gone! Annihilation is the word! These dead are thrown out upon the rubbish-heap of time, like ashes drawn from burnt-out fires. Not even the barest forms of matter are thus consigned to dead oblivion. Even this garment of clay, in which we walk the ways of men, is caught up into the texture of the universe, and allowed to play its part again in the divine economy. But these souls are blotted out—destroyed! They are not even given the privilege, granted to the meanest schoolboy, of trying again—of making good his original mistake. One opportunity only is granted, and “if we fail, we fail!” There is an end to all, henceforth and forever!

A more terrible fate than this of annihilation has never been conceived by the human imagination. So terrible is it, indeed, that immediately we find ourselves asking if there are any souls

¹ See Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Longfellow's translation), Canto V, line 135: “This one, who ne'er from me shall be divided.”

so worthless as to deserve such a doom as this? How are we to discriminate between the natural man and the spiritual man? Where are we to draw the line between those who are destined to literal destruction and those who are destined to immortality?

Shall we begin with the feeble-minded, the idiotic, and the insane? But why should we condemn the souls of these unhappy beings to annihilation, merely because of the disorganization of their physical bodies? How many times has the defective been restored to a normal condition of intellectuality by some simple surgical operation on the ear or the eye, or by the supply of adequate nourishment to the anæmic and half-starved body? How often has the idiot been made rational by the healing of a lesion or the removal of a blood-clot in the brain? How often has the lunatic been brought back to some degree of sanity at least by the sweet balm of rest and peace? The souls of these unfortunates are as fair and true as those of any normal person. And yet is it seriously proposed that these souls shall be destroyed because they are caught in the jarring mechanism of disordered bodies. As well argue that the sun should be blotted out because it fails to send its rays through the sooty window of a neglected furnace-room! As well say that the fresh breezes of the sky should be suppressed because they fail to make their way into the windowless rooms of the city tenement! As well

declare that Paderewski should be driven from every concert room because he cannot woo the ears of men with Chopin's melodies upon some untuned, broken-stringed piano of yester-year! These poor imbeciles and lunatics must be the last and not the first to be destroyed. If any are to be flung upon the refuse heap, let it be those who have lived their lives in "sweetness and light," made their contribution to the spiritual sum of things, had their chance and done their work. Something might be said for destruction in these cases, but nothing surely for the destruction of those who, badly born, cruelly neglected, ravaged by stress and strain, have been denied their opportunity of life!

Or is it the criminals whom we will discard? But here again we are deterred by the illuminating experiences of our day and generation. For we are making a study of criminality today from a fresh viewpoint and with a new sympathy, and we are more and more coming to see that not the individual, but the society which has borne and trained him, is the responsible factor in the lives of the great majority of offenders. A few wrong-doers are undoubtedly bad, in the sense that they deliberately, with knowledge and malice aforethought, will to do evil. More wrong-doers are defective, either physically, or mentally, or both—as witness the great number of prostitutes who are feeble-minded. But the overwhelming majority of wrong-doers are the victims of the hopeless

environment in which they have been reared. The juvenile delinquent in the Manhattan court comes almost invariably from certain restricted areas in the slum sections of the lower and upper East Side. The pickpocket, burglar, and gunman is the natural product of the tenement which has no home, of the street which has no playground, of the poverty which has no physical comforts nor moral standards, of the whole economic system at the bottom of which is the starved, neglected, and corrupted child. The prostitute, save in those cases where feeble-mindedness is the determining factor, is the weak or desperate victim of low wages, long hours, exhausted vitality, and a soul starved of pleasure, companionship, and affection. The fact of the matter is that we all represent nothing more nor less than a mixture of good and bad impulses. In every one of us there is the downward tendency toward the life of physical indulgence, selfish ambition, personal aggrandizement and power; and in every one of us also the upward tendency toward the life of devotion, self-sacrifice, love. There is no one of us so good but what he has his inward struggles against selfishness, deceit, and lust; and no one of us so bad but what he has his moments of noble striving for the true, the beautiful, and the good. The best of us embody the inherent possibilities of all that is in the worst; and the worst of us contain the inherent possibilities of all that is in the best. St. Paul never wrote a truer word than when he

depicted, in his letter to the Romans, the awful struggle that is going on all the time between what he called the flesh and the spirit.

Now it is people of this kind, who are both good and bad, and not people who are wholly the one thing or the other, who are being born into this world of ours. Some of these people are born into an environment of such a character that, from the very earliest years on, they find every good impulse of their natures fostered and encouraged, and every bad impulse withered and repressed. But how is it with the people who are born amid other circumstances—these hordes of men and women in city slum and rural cottage who constitute the great majority of humanity? These people, like all others, find within themselves the same natural mixture of good and bad. But instead of being helped by the social conditions into which they are born, and amid which they live and work from day to day, they find, on the contrary, that every influence is dead against them. Some there are among these denizens of earth who are born with indomitable and unconquerable wills, and these succeed in winning out even against the most terrific odds. And the world immediately does the grossly inhuman thing of citing these exceptional moral geniuses as proofs that everybody can win out in the economic and spiritual struggle, if he really wants to—as though everybody could be a Shakespeare, a Napoleon, or a Lincoln, by simply trying! The fact of the matter is that the

majority of men and women are simply average, that is all, and when they find themselves living in a social environment which is ugly, unhealthy, and degrading, they go to pieces—first physically, and then slowly but surely morally!

Born into unwholesome tenements which never get a breath of fresh air or a ray of sunlight, and which are filled with dirt, disease, and decay of every kind—denied clean, nourishing, and adequate food—neglected and abused by parents who are worn out by exhausting and ill-paid toil—playing in dark tenements and dirty gutters, and never in green pastures and by still waters—put to work in sweatshop or factory or store at the age when freedom and joy are the natural accompaniments of existence—living in small rooms crowded with boarders as well as members of the family, where personal privacy and all standards of ordinary decency are precluded—overwhelmed, in short, from the very hour of birth, by all the conditions which grinding poverty makes inevitable in a great city today—what wonder that they go wrong sooner or later? What wonder that bad impulses grow, and good impulses wither? What wonder that the girls find it easy to become prostitutes, and the boys to become criminals? Why, when I consider the way the majority of people in this world have to live—the ceaseless struggle which they have to make for bread—the things of beauty, joy, and love which they are denied from year's end to year's end—the degrading influences of physical

depression, mental darkness, and spiritual atrophy which assail them every moment of every day—my wonder is not that so many of them give way morally, but, on the contrary, that so many, in spite of every adverse condition, succeed in living pure, honest, upright, righteous lives. Do you ask me if I believe in the divinity of human nature? I answer, yes! And if you want to know the grounds for my belief, I point you first of all not to the classic achievements of the martyrs, saints, and heroes of ancient days, but to the martyrs, saints, and heroes of our own day, who are facing the indescribable horrors of economic dependence, and still, in spite of all, are keeping sweet, brave, and true. And it is the weaker among these “our brethren,” who have been unable to endure, who we are asked to believe, forsooth, are not worth saving to another opportunity in another life!

But perhaps the vast hordes of alien people who swarm like flies on distant continents are the ones who are fated to be cast into outer darkness! They certainly have no individual preciousness and would only glut the heavenly spaces by their continuance. They serve no purpose in this world, and surely can serve no purpose in the next! But are we so sure of this fact? Are these swarming multitudes as worthless as they may seem? What did the proud Romans suspect of the destiny of the blond giants who trod the forests of Germania? What did Byzantium dream of the dirty

Bedouins who roamed the deserts of Arabia? What know we of the fate in store for the starving Chinaman and the brooding Hindoo? And even though no part in the world's progress is awaiting these peoples, is it so certain that their lives are still of no abiding worth? If we think so, in our flip-pant, superior way, is not the trouble with us rather than with them? Certainly their lives have a significance from *their* point of view, if not from ours; and they would demur as quickly, we may imagine, at the prospect of their ultimate destruction as we would at such a prospect of our own. The joy and expectancy of life are as hot with them as with ourselves. They hail each morning sun, and bless the coming of each restful night. They play their games, and reap their harvests. They marry and give in marriage, hail the coming of little children and weep the passing of their beloved. They pray to God, and crave the joys of eternity. Life to them is sweet, and destruction terrible. There is "not a being of the countless throng," says Professor James, in his refreshing discussion of this point in *Human Immortality*,

whose continued life is not called for, and called for intensely, by the consciousness that animates the being's form. That *you* neither realize nor understand nor call for it . . . is an absolutely irrelevant circumstance. That you have a saturation point of interest tells us nothing of the interests that absolutely are.¹

¹ See *Human Immortality*, pages 39-40.

Why should they not live? The universe has room for all. The very fact that it has created all proves that it needs all and will preserve all. What we reveal, when we class these alien throngs as worthless dross, is our lack of that cosmic vision which sees the significance of all life just because it is life, and detects in the love of life the justification of life. Given that cosmic vision, instantly it becomes plain that each individual existence is only one more channel of expression through which the Divine Spirit manifests itself, and that, inasmuch as this Spirit is infinite, there can never be too many channels. The worth which every meanest human being finds in his own life is itself the guarantee of that worth, and the assurance that its origin is in God!

And the same thing must be said in reference to all these myriad ancestors of ours, who have battled and toiled in the aeons gone. It is natural to think of them as mere animals, and therefore not entitled to immortality. Surely their inclusion within the scope of life eternal seems to lower the nature of that life and thus cheapen immeasurably the dearest of all boons. And yet, who that really has "the understanding heart" can draw the line even against these! These creatures of the cave and wood, brutish as they seem, are still our brothers, are they not?—as much our kin as those who precede us by but a century or two! All that we have of body and of mind, they lived and suffered to maintain. The passions they felt,

the instincts they followed, the privations they endured, the experiments they made, the visions they saw, the faiths they cherished, the lives they lived, and the deaths they died—these are what have brought us where we are. The torch of life now blazing in our hands is the torch which was passed on, in centuries of darkness, a feeble and a flickering flame, from hand to hand of these our blood progenitors! With what heart now can we cast these off? By what right can we, the heirs of their struggles and achievements, deny to them the boon we cherish for ourselves? Bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, are not these nameless creatures also spirit of our spirit? The difference between us, the civilized, and them, the savage and brutish, is indeed prodigious—but more prodigious still is the basic identity that binds us in one great family of God.

Not our differences and distinctions . . . but our common animal essence of patience under suffering and enduring effort must be what redeems us in the Deity's sight. . . . An immortality from which these inconceivable billions of fellow-strivers should be excluded becomes an irrational idea for us. That our superiority in personal refinement . . . should constitute a difference between ourselves and our messmates at life's banquet, fit to entail such a consequential difference of destiny as eternal life for us, and for them . . . death with the beasts that perish, is a notion too absurd to be considered serious.¹

¹ See James, *Human Immortality*, page 34.

A thousand times more rational is it to suppose that the beasts themselves live on, to share with man the life of heaven as well as the life of earth!

There are no worthless! There are no human creatures so lost as to be justly doomed to the awful fate of annihilation! Our every action toward these classes which I have named reveals our instinctive consciousness of their basic worth and our undying hope for their ultimate recovery. The most hopeless defectives we shelter tenderly in pleasant refuges. The wildest lunatics we rigidly protect from their own mad instincts to self-destruction. The vilest criminals we strive to save by the tested practices of penological reform. The "heathen" hordes of China arouse the world to immeasurable sacrifices, lest one soul perish. The starving multitudes of India, in famine days, summon grain ships from every corner of the globe, lest one hungry mouth go unfed. The sweating slum-dwellers of our cities stir the conscience of the nation, lest one puny infant needlessly succumb. Man draws no lines, erects no barriers, respects no persons! All are holy in his sight! And now, forsooth, shall God do less than man? Shall he cast out, when man would retain? Shall he destroy, when man would preserve? Shall he be another Setebos, who, for any reason or with any purpose, shall treat men as Caliban the crabs?

Am strong myself compared to yonder crabs
That march now from the mountain to the sea,

Let twenty pass, and stone the twenty-first,
Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.
Say, the first straggler that boasts purple spots
Shall join the file, one pincer twisted off,
Say, this bruised fellow shall receive a worm,
And two worms he whose nippers end in red;
As it likes me each time, I do: so He.

The thing is unthinkable. God, no less than man, must give his love "even unto the least of these." All are the children of his spirit, and therefore all of infinite worth in his paternal sight! As well imagine a mother declaring one of the children whom she has borne in travail and suckled at her bosom of "no account" and abandoning him freely to destruction, as to imagine God rejecting one human soul as worthless and dooming it to permanent annihilation! Jesus knew well the mind of God when he declared that, like as a "woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it," or as a "man having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth leave the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it," "even so it is the will of your Father which is in heaven, that not one of these little ones should perish." If of sparrows, how much truer of men, that "not one of them is forgotten before God"!

So far as the worth of men is concerned, therefore, all must be entitled to eternal life. There can be no condition of immortality short of the

love of God, which is universal! All men are his, and will be his forever! Nor need we be disturbed at what Professor James calls the "plethora and glut" of such a limitless salvation. There is no saturation-point in things spiritual as in things physical. Earth may become over-crowded with men's bodies, but not heaven with their souls. For the realm of consciousness is susceptible to indefinite expansion. Each new mind occupies its own space, and trespasses not at all upon the space of other minds. Indeed, may we not even say, with Kant, that space is the creation of the mind—an attribute of mind as quantity is of matter; and that therefore each mind provides within itself the space which it must occupy?¹ Certain it is that it is bodies and not souls that impose limits to earth's population, and that when the bodies are gone, these limits will be removed. Therefore may unnumbered souls live on into eternity, and still the realm of spirit be uncrowded.

VI

But how about the doctrine of natural selection, which seemed to fit in so aptly with our theory of conditional immortality? Can any theory of universalism be made compatible with this fundamental factor of the evolutionary process? If

¹ See James, *Human Immortality*, pages 40, 41: "Each new mind brings its own edition of the universe of space along with it, its own room to inhabit."

not, are we not made to choose between these two conceptions; and if it comes to this, must we not cling to natural selection, with all its fateful implications, as the principle which has behind it the facts of life and not merely the speculations of theology? The struggle for existence is certainly basic in the physical world; survival of the fittest is certainly the outcome of this struggle. Must not the struggle, now, be conceived of as continuing over into the spiritual world, and the survival of the fittest as the outcome there as here? And in this case, as we have seen, must not the doctrine of universalism be deemed impossible, and some such doctrine of conditional immortality as we have outlined inevitable?

So it would seem in theory! But in fact, this is not true! The cosmic process of struggle and survival is indeed dominant in the vast realm of organic life below the range of man. It has been, and still is, a factor in the development of humanity.

As among other animals [says Thomas Huxley, in his famous *Romanes Lecture*] multiplication goes on without cessation and involves severe competition for the means of support. The struggle for existence tends to eliminate those less fitted to adapt themselves to the circumstances of their existence. The strongest, the most self-assertive, tend to tread down the weaker.¹

¹ See *Evolution and Ethics*, page 81.

But nobody can study human history with any understanding of the facts involved, without observing that, very early in his career, man began, at first unconsciously, and then ever more deliberately, to interfere with the ruthless workings of the selective process, and to protect and preserve those members of the human family who might otherwise be destroyed. More and more he began to have sympathy for the weak, and, in response to this sympathy, to put forth efforts to shelter them from the rude buffets of the world. Women were very generally removed from the struggle for existence, and given over to the protection of father or husband. Children were universally sheltered until after the period of adolescence was well passed. The sick, the crippled, the defective, the insane, the aged, at first cast out or even destroyed as fatal burdens to the family or the tribe, were gradually regarded with more consideration and even tenderness, until today the mightiest example of concerted effort that humanity can show is that which is put forth in alleviation of the miseries and in protection of the weaknesses of all those who, from the standpoint of nature, must be regarded as "unfit." Indeed, so far has this sacrifice on behalf of the helpless been carried in recent times, that it may be almost said that man has not merely interfered with the natural workings of the cosmic process, but has actually reversed it. It is the strong who are sent first to endure the labours and the hazards of industry—

the fit who are deliberately selected for the peculiar perils of the sea, the wilderness, and the battlefield—the best who are gladly sacrificed for the uplift of the poor, the healing of the diseased, and the solace of the wretched. And, on the other hand, is it the infirm, the sick, the imbecile, the criminal, the aged, who are protected at any expense of money, time, and labour. Not survival, but sacrifice, is today regarded as the noblest achievement of mankind; and the death of the strong for the sake of the weak, the supreme atonement of the soul! The sharp command that rings across the deck of a sinking ship, "Women and children first!" is the climactic illustration, perhaps, of man's sublime defiance of the cosmic law of life!

To many thorough-going evolutionists, this reversal in the human realm of the natural process of struggle and survival marks a concession to emotion, which is destined to be fatal, sooner or later, to the welfare of the race. Here we are, they say, deliberately hazarding the fit and sheltering the unfit and thus overthrowing the very process which has made us what we are, and yet expecting to survive! Is it not certain that, in this case as in every case where nature is defied, nothing but destruction can be the final outcome?

To a man like Thomas Huxley, however, who could appreciate not only the biological but also the ethical factors involved, the problem was not so simple. He saw as clearly as anybody that man was reversing nature's law, but he also saw that

man was doing this startling thing in response to the call of those profound emotions of the soul which distinguish the human from the animal, and which give to life its moral beauty and spiritual sublimity. Nothing is more evident, says Huxley, in the *Lecture* to which I have already referred, than the fact that all that we mean by civilization, enlightenment, social progress has been achieved simply and solely by a checking of the cosmic process at every step and substitution for it of another, which may be called the ethical process. "We must understand," he declares, "that the ethical progress of society depends not on imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combating it."¹ Man is man and not a "tiger, red in tooth and claw with ravin"—humanity finds its embodiment in an ordered society and not in a wild jungle *mêlée*—for no other reason than that man has decreed that sacrifice shall displace struggle as the law of life, and the weak survive even at the cost of the strong. We might as well make up our minds that "the cosmic process has no sort of relation to moral ends," and that morality is achieved, love won, and service rendered to one another, only because man has succeeded in stopping the oppositions of the natural process, so far at least, as they apply to him, and in substituting another and better process in its place!

But has not Huxley, now, got us into a worse

¹ See *Evolution and Ethics*, page 83.

dilemma than that created by the thorough-going evolutionist who declares that the humanitarianism of our time, which uses up the fit and preserves the unfit, means progressive degeneration and thus ultimate extinction of the race? Look at some of the propositions that are necessarily involved in Huxley's doctrine! In the first place, his statements assert an out-and-out "breach of continuity between evolution in general and the evolution of man in particular"¹—a fact abhorrent to the modern scientific mind which is convinced, by a thousand evidences, that nature constitutes an unbroken unity throughout! Secondly, they involve the flat assumption that the natural processes, outside of those which man determines, are essentially immoral, and that the social progress of humanity constitutes an indictment of God's universe. Lastly, there is raised the question, to which Huxley never succeeded in finding an answer, as to where man got the ethical emotions which persuade him to interfere with nature's law of survival, if not from the world below him? The moral sentiments of humanity have undoubtedly been evolved, says Huxley; no miraculous or supernatural accounts of their origin are admissible! But if evolved, there remains the question, from what? Can the moral evolve from the immoral, sacrifice from self-assertion, love from hate? If there is no natural sanction for morality, then is it not as plain as day that the sanction

¹ See John Fiske, *Through Nature to God*, page 76.

must be supernatural? And behold the spectacle which convulsed the scientific world of the early '90's—Thomas Huxley, the original agnostic, appropriated by orthodox theologians everywhere as an ally of supernatural Christianity!

It was the impossibility, to say nothing of the absurdity, of this situation, which led to a fresh study of this perplexing problem by evolutionists everywhere—with the result that hitherto unknown or neglected facts were speedily discovered, and a new reading of cosmic history produced! Such writings as Henry Drummond's *The Ascent of Man*, P. Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid a Factor of Evolution*, and John Fiske's Phi Beta Kappa oration on *The Cosmic Roots of Love and Self-Sacrifice*,¹ tell the story of this new chapter of evolution, the meaning of which can be summed up in the simple statement that the cosmic process involves not merely the factor of the struggle for life, but, side by side with this, and ever growing in importance, the complementary factor of the struggle for the life of others.

As the story of evolution is usually told [says Drummond, whose statement is perhaps the most striking yet produced], love . . . has not even a place. Almost the whole emphasis of science has fallen upon the opposite—the animal struggle for life. Hunger was early seen by the naturalists to be the first and most imperious appetite of all living things, and the

¹ Published as the second essay in *Through Nature to God*, page 57.

course of nature came to be erroneously interpreted in terms of never-ending strife. Since there are vastly more creatures born than can ever survive, since for every morsel of food provided a hundred claimants appear, life to an animal was described to us as one long tragedy, and poetry, borrowing the imperfect creed, pictured nature as a blood-red fang. . . . To interpret the whole course of nature by the struggle for life, however, is as absurd as if one were to define the character of St. Francis by the tempers of his childhood. Worlds grow up as well as infants, their tempers change, their better nature opens out, new objects of desire appear, higher activities are added to the lower. The first chapter or two of the story of evolution may be headed the Struggle for Life; but take the book as a whole and it is not a tale of battle. It is a love story.¹

Illustrations of this great truth, at first almost unseen, are now so abundant as to be almost embarrassing. Co-operation, mutual helpfulness, struggle not for self but for others, is everywhere present in nature and apparently as basic in character as the instinct of self-preservation. The flower co-operates with the bee, and the bee with the flower, in the great task of survival. Beetles assist each other in burying their eggs, many caterpillars weave in common, bees live in hives and ants in colonies. Birds are so conspicuously bound by ties of what seem to be loyalty and affection as to have served in all ages as the poetic

¹ *The Ascent of Man*, page 217.

symbol of love. A myriad of animals—beavers, wolves, deer, buffaloes, horses, sheep, elephants, giraffes—work and hunt together, and thus sustain their life in common. Indeed, the gregarious and social animals have an immense preponderance over all others, the carnivora being comparatively few in number and very obviously also falling behind in the struggle for survival.¹ Instances of sympathy and self-sacrificing kindness among the brutes crowd the pages of natural history literature. The sand-wasp laboriously laying up a provision of fresh food in a sealed store-house for the offspring which it is never to behold, the nightingale feeding the mother-bird regularly while she is sitting on her nest, the dog mothering the orphaned kittens committed to her charge, the lioness leaping at the spear which is hurled at her cubs—these are familiar types of family devotion in nature. Nor are such examples confined to expressions of the maternal or paternal instinct. It is well known that ants will come to the rescue of their fellows, at the peril of their own lives, when disaster has swept down upon the colony. When buffaloes, deer, or elephants are attacked, the males will put the females and the young behind some shelter and themselves advance against the enemy. Romanes tells a well-authenticated story of a monkey on shipboard who threw a cord, one end of which was tied to his own body,

¹ It is noteworthy that it is these animals which Huxley cites as representing the successful types in the competitions of nature.

to a companion monkey which had fallen overboard.¹ Thomas Edward, the Scotch naturalist, saw a tern, which he had wounded so that it could not fly, lifted up by two of its comrades and carried to a rock in the sea beyond his reach.² Darwin relates, in his *Descent of Man*, the now famous story of the baboons in Abyssinia.

Some of the troop [he says] had already ascended the opposite mountain, and some were still in the valley. The latter were attacked by the dogs, but the old males immediately hurried down from the rocks, and with mouths widely open, roared so fearfully, that the dogs quickly drew back. They were again encouraged to the attack; but by this time all the baboons had reascended the heights, excepting a young one, about six months old, who, loudly calling for aid, climbed on a block of rock, and was surrounded. Now one of the largest males, a true hero, came down again from the mountain, slowly went to the young one, coaxed him, and triumphantly led him away—the dogs being too much astonished to make an attack.³

Right here, in such illustrations as these which could be multiplied almost indefinitely, do we find that moral element in the cosmic process, which Huxley mistakenly declared did not exist. Side by side, from the very beginning, with the fierce

¹ See *Animal Intelligence*, page 475.

² Cited by James T. Bixby, in *The New World and the New Thought*, page 46, where an abundance of these stories may be found.

³ See *The Descent of Man*, page 102.

struggle for life, and ever tending to supersede it, is the struggle for the life of others. "Beside [this]," says Drummond, "the struggle for life is but a passing phase. As old, as deeply sunk in nature, this further force was destined from the first to replace the struggle for life, and to build a nobler superstructure on the foundations which it laid."¹ And right here, in this mighty factor of the evolutionary development, do we find that origin of man's ethical passion which, from Huxley's standpoint, remained unexplained on any other than out-and-out supernatural grounds. There is no break, after all, in the continuity of the cosmic process. Man is not defying, combating, interfering with, and at last reversing the law by which life has been developing through the stages of evolution beneath himself. On the contrary, in his tenderness for the weak and his protection of the helpless, in his noblest service for his fellows, in his sublimest sacrifice "for others' sakes," he has been acting in accordance with a principle as deep-rooted as that of natural selection itself, and so much more basic in the entire process from top to bottom that long before the line of development had mounted to his level, the law of tooth and claw had been superseded, and the law of love and sacrifice installed in its place. In him the cosmic process finds not its end, but its fulfilment. Not sheer brute strength is the condition of survival. Else why have all "the dragons of the prime" who

¹ See *The Ascent of Man*, page 214.

“tear each other in their slime”—the ichthyosauri, dinosauria, theriosauria, mammoths, and the rest—long since disappeared, and animals infinitely feebler and smaller physically, but socially and mutually helpful by nature, survived and multiplied? It is love that counts, even with the brutes that rend and tear; and man is the highest of the brutes, and the truest revelation of the real meaning of the cosmic process, because with him love counts the most! In him do we find the justification and not the contradiction of nature’s workings—the proof that the cosmic process seeks to save, and not to destroy!

The moral sentiments, the moral law, devotion to unselfish ends, disinterested love . . . these [says John Fiske, in one of his noblest passages] are nature’s most highly-wrought products, latest in coming to maturity; they are the consummation toward which all earlier prophecy has pointed. . . . Below the surface din and clashing of the struggle for life we hear the undertone of the deep ethical purpose, as it rolls in solemn music through the ages, its volume swelled by every victory, great or small, of right over wrong, till in the fullness of time, in God’s own time, it shall burst forth in the triumphant chorus of humanity purified and redeemed.¹

VII

In all of this, now, do we see the definite supersession of natural selection, as the principle of

¹ See *Through Nature to God*, page 130.

survival through the struggle for life, by the deeply moral principle of the struggle for the life of others. And with this does there disappear, for good and all, the last argument that can be raised in favour of the doctrine of conditional immortality. The essence of this argument was the contention that what was true in the physical realm must be true also in the spiritual. The struggle of the many and the survival of the few seemed the dominant principle of existence in this world, and therefore must this continue as the dominant principle of existence in the world to come! But now we see that we have been mistaken in our observation of nature's workings. Not the struggle for the survival of self, but the struggle for the survival of others has been the basic law of the cosmic process, and in the noble sacrifices of the strong man for his weaker brothers do we see this law come at last to its fulfilment. To save even the weakest from destruction—this has been the end and aim of life in all its varied forms in this present world, from the ooze and slime of primeval days upon the one hand to the glorious heights of ethical achievement to which the race has now attained upon the other. And shall not this process go on to ever larger issues and nobler triumphs in the world that is to come? What is it that is seen in the essentially moral ends of the evolutionary process—the tenderness of the male tiger for his mate, the love of the female bear for her cubs, the co-operation of the beetle and the

ant, the mutual helpfulness of sheep and deer, the domestic loyalty of the birds—but the spirit of God working itself out in the creative processes of his divine handiwork! What is it that is seen in the sublime heroisms of human life—the mother suffering for her child, the patriot bleeding for his country, the martyr dying for his cause—but the spirit of God coming at last unto its own!

The picket frozen on duty,
The mother starved for her brood,
Socrates drinking the hemlock,
And Jesus on the rood;
The millions, who humble and nameless,
The straight, hard pathway trod,
Some call it consecration—and others call it God!

God indeed! The perpetual atonement of the Most High for the salvation of the lives which he has made! And shall God not continue, in the world to come, the work which he has begun here, and carry this work at last to its completion? If pelicans can feed a blind comrade with fish brought many miles,¹ if a baboon can rush into a pack of raging dogs and rescue a fellow-monkey at the risk of his own life, if Titus Oates can walk out to his certain death in the freezing storm that his enfeebled companions may not be hampered by his disability—shall not God strive on, with the patience of an infinite love, to the salvation of even the least among his children? The struggle for

¹ See Darwin's *Descent of Man*, page 102.

the lives of others is God's struggle, the compassion of the cosmic process is his compassion, the sacrifices of humanity are his sacrifices. And as surely as these manifest his desire that no living thing shall die in vain, but all be preserved to the service of the whole, so surely they manifest also his purpose that no human soul shall perish, but all be similarly preserved to the service of his eternal Kingdom. The cosmic process may mean conditional immortality. But the ethical process means universalism. Whether we follow Huxley or Fiske or Drummond, this ethical process is alike supreme, and immortality therefore extended unto all!

VIII

And does not this give one final intimation of the reality of the eternal hope—one final proof of the truth of immortality? If evolution, as interpreted ethically, means anything at all, it means that God yearns to preserve every living soul. But if this life is the be-all and end-all of existence, success is impossible. The low grade of the great bulk of human existence shows that, from this standpoint, God is doomed to failure. He needs time to accomplish his purpose, time to bring the irresistible influences of his spirit to bear upon mankind, time to lift up all men unto himself! And is it not just this needful time that is given us by the conception of immortality? Here, indeed,

is the great significance of the immortal hope. It gives time for God to accomplish that purpose which must be accomplished if he is to justify his wisdom. It gives the chance which God must have to save all men who must be saved if the universe is not to be revealed as an immoral waste of life and love. The whole interpretation of the cosmic process in terms of mutual helpfulness leads inevitably to universalism as the only possible condition of its fulfilment. And universalism, by the same token, leads inevitably to immortality as the only possible condition of its fulfilment. Dr. George A. Gordon has summed it all up in a splendid passage in his *Immortality and the New Theodicy*.

The mass of humanity which (evolution) rolls into the field of vision is so great that the moral conception of the universe must either rise to meet the new emergency or perish. If the moral view of man's life shall insist upon identifying itself with theories of the remnant, election, or probation confined to this life, it is simply taking steps to destroy itself. For no man in his senses can survey the bewildering total of humanity that evolution puts before him, and admit that the saving interest of God in mankind ceases at death, and still believe that God is a moral being. It is either something other and infinitely better than this, or it is nothing. . . . Either this world is a moral world, or it is not; if it is a moral world, the Creator's redeeming interest in mankind must continue forever.¹

¹ See *Immortality and the New Theodicy*, pages 87, 88.

IX

The theory of conditional immortality, therefore, stands utterly discredited. If eternal life is true at all, it is true for all! Nor does this conclusion involve a sacrifice of that moral content of the doctrine of eternal life which seemed to be peculiarly the possession of the conditional theory of immortality. Indeed, no greater mistake could be made than to regard universalism as implying an indifference to sin and its dreadful consequences. To assert that all men are immortal does not in any sense involve the assertion that sinful men are to escape the penalties of their sin. It is simply to declare that this penalty is not destruction. For the universalist, exactly as for the believer in eternal torment or selective annihilation, sin brings its merited punishment, and the longer it continues and the deeper it goes, the more terrible the punishment and the longer postponed the hour of recovery. But the punishment comes to purify and not avenge, to save and not cast out, to fulfil and not destroy. "God is not mocked" that he should be successfully defied by men. His perfect love cannot be doomed to failure in any single instance. Sooner or later he must overcome and win to its own redemption even the most obdurate heart. Thus does universalism retain all the moral aspects characteristic of the more rigorous doctrines of the future life, and at the same time eliminate the twin horror of a defeated deity and

a stricken child! No guilt is pardoned, no stain ignored, no wages of sin unpaid! But the crowning triumph of an undivided and reconciled humanity is attained!

Universalism signifies that God is omnipotent—that the divine love is not in vain—that the cosmic process is moved by moral forces unto moral ends! It is at bottom the guarantee of the rationality, the beauty, and the goodness of the world and of all its teeming forms of life from the earliest amœba to the latest man. With this great faith forever planted in our hearts, we shall not find it difficult to

. . . trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood,

That not a worm is cloven in vain,
That not a moth with vain desire
Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain,

That nothing walks with aimless feet,
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete.

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT WILL IMMORTALITY BE LIKE?

“Nothing can be more opposed to every estimate we can form of probability than the common idea of the future life. . . . All the probabilities in the case of a future life are that such as we have been made or have made ourselves before the change, such we shall enter into the life hereafter; and that the fact of death will make no sudden break in our spiritual life. If there be a future life, it will be at least as good as the present, and will not be wanting in the best feature of the present life, improvability by our own efforts.”—John Stuart Mill, in *Essay on Theism*, Part III.

THE question, Is death the end? has now been answered, in so far as such an answer is possible. We have come to the conclusion that all indications point not merely to the possibility, or even probability, but also to the practical certainty, of the continuance of personal existence after death. We have even gone so far as to assert that the argument for this hypothesis of immortality is so strong that it can justly be characterized as a “proof.” And this eternal life we have furthermore declared to be unconditioned, and thus the natural inheritance of all men, as the children of the ever-living and ever-loving God.

I

These conclusions, however, have by no means brought us to the end of our discussion. The very positiveness of our affirmation has only served to raise other and deeper problems. And first among them all is the very practical inquiry as to the nature of the immortal life. What, in other words, will immortality be like?

Until comparatively recent times, this question was more generally and seriously considered than it ever is at the present day. In the medieval and early Protestant eras, of course, the fact of eternal life was almost everywhere taken for granted. Until the period of the Illumination in the eighteenth century, discussion of the matter as a problem for debate was almost unknown, and when, for any reason, it was broached, it was instantly silenced as a sign of heresy. This does not mean that there was no writing or talking about the future world. On the contrary, such discussion was of the liveliest kind. But instead of dealing with the question as to whether or not we are destined to immortality, it passed on to the remoter question as to what this immortality will be like. In this field speculation was free, and therefore abundant.

In recent times, however, all this has changed. The scientific and philosophical revolutions of the last half-century, as we have seen, shook man's belief in the eternal life to its foundations. Old

ideas vanished like mist before the sun. Old viewpoints were shown to be untenable, and therefore abandoned. New facts swept down upon man's mind like an avalanche, and buried in one stupendous ruin the former clearings and edifices of his faith. Everything familiar and precious was apparently destroyed. And now, like the citizens of a lost village, was he confronted by the stupendous task of reconstructing the structure of his religious thought from the ground up. To this work did man set himself, with grim determination; and for a full generation did he busy himself with the discouraging labour of clearing away debris and laying new foundations. Are we immortal at all, was the question which now beset him, as it beset his progenitors in the earliest dawn of the world's life. And so fully occupied has he been with this initial and basic problem, and so far has he come from working out any satisfactory solution, that he has simply been unable to advance to any later stages of cosmic speculation.

Today, however, the scene is changing once again. Man has succeeded in his labour. The old faith in immortality is re-establishing itself upon new and firm foundations. Again we challenge death! Again we feel ourselves to be eternal! And with this settlement of the ancient problem achieved, there comes again a shifting of the field of speculation. Taking the immortal life for granted, as in the olden time, we again give ourselves to the task of trying to pierce the veil and

look upon the undiscovered country which awaits our coming! Again we inquire what will immortality be like! And this we do, be it noted, from no mere sense of idle curiosity! Such an inquiry is unavoidable. The reasons for our faith are new. Must not the content of this faith be new as well? If there is "a new earth," must there not likewise be "a new heaven"; and may we not rightly ask to see the one as well as the other?

II

The old ideas of the future life are tolerably familiar. There is the heaven, for instance, of our North American Indians—the Happy Hunting Ground, as it was called—a vast country located beyond the western mountains, full of trees and pleasant streams of water, and plentifully stocked with buffalo and deer for the chase. Scarcely less familiar is the idea of the next world which was cherished by the Norsemen of Scandinavia. This heaven was thought of as a great hall or castle, called Valhalla, into which were admitted only those who as valiant warriors had ended their days upon the field of battle, and in which fighting, feasting, and drinking were the eternal pastimes of the heroes. Loftier in every way were the conceptions of immortality portrayed in the mythological literature of the Greeks—conceptions which are variously typified by such names as the Garden of the Hesperides, the Happy Country of the Hyper-

boreans, the Islands of the Blest, and the Elysian Fields. Fully as impressive and far more rational than these legendary ideas is the description of the future given us by Plato, in his Dialogue entitled *Phaedo*. Here do we find heaven depicted as a kind of glorified earth, where the blessings of this present world are retained and magnified, and its attendant ills forever banished. Nor should we forget the Mohammedan picture of the life beyond the grave in the *Koran*—a paradise of gardens, shaded by trees, refreshed by sparkling fountains, and crowded with “beautiful damsels, having complexions like rubies and pearls,” the whole seeming more like some gorgeous scene in the *Thousand and One Nights* than the content of a great book of revealed religion!

All these are pagan conceptions of the next world. Of more immediate interest are the various ideas which are characteristic of our own Christianity. Strangely enough, in the recorded teachings of those two great leaders, Jesus and Paul, with whom the Christian Church had its beginning, we find no precise descriptions of the life to come. Both men taught with unmistakable conviction the doctrine of immortality, but, apart from a few vague references here and there, gave not a hint of what they thought or hoped the future would be like. The first definite description of heaven to be found in early Christian literature is that contained in the concluding chapters of *Revelation*, and here, it may be said, we get a wealth of par-

particulars which goes far toward making up for the deficiencies of the Gospels and the Epistles. The vision of the "new heaven,"¹ which is presented in this apocalypse, is one of such amazing precision that the dimensions of "the holy city" are all given in exact figures. Then follows a picture of almost indescribable splendour and beauty. The walls of the city are made of jasper, the foundations "garnished with all manner of precious stones." The gates are of pearl, and the city itself of "pure gold, like unto clear glass." Through the midst of the city runs "a pure river of water of life," and "on either side of the river was the tree of life, which bore twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month."² These are a few of the marvellous wonders of the "new Jerusalem" which was seen in vision by St. John—a heaven, we may say, which rivals in luxury and beauty even the paradise of the *Koran*.

The traditional Christian idea of heaven, however, comes not so much from this book of *Revelation*, as from the descriptions of the future world written down by Dante in his *Divine Comedy* and by Milton in his *Paradise Lost*. Or rather shall we say that in the stupendous works of these two surpassing geniuses, the one a Catholic Florentine and the other a Protestant Englishman, the Chris-

¹ Strictly speaking, in the beginning, a "new earth," but speedily regarded as a picture of the life to come.

² See *Revelation* xxi and xxii.

tian conceptions of the life to come found their perfect and final expression?

Dante's description of heaven is found in the third division of the *Divine Comedy*—the *Paradiso*. While going into few of the materialistic details so characteristic of *Revelation*, the poet succeeds in giving an overwhelming impression, in the course of his long narrative, of light supernal and glory ineffable. Everywhere are the spirits of the blessed, bathed in the radiant effulgence of the divine splendour as we on the earth are bathed in the atmosphere, and, in their eternal contemplation and worship of the Triune God, experiencing nothing but ecstasy and peace. It is in the thirty-first canto, where Dante sees "the saintly host displayed in fashion as of a snow-white rose," and "that other host, that flying sees and sings the glory of Him," that the poem reaches its climax.

Their faces had they all of living flame,
 And wings of gold, and all the rest so white
 No snow unto that limit doth attain.
 From bench to bench, into the flower descending,
 They carried something of the peace and ardour
 Which by the fanning of their flanks they won.

This realm secure and full of gladsomeness,
 Crowded with ancient people and with modern,
 Unto one mark had all its look and love.¹

Milton's description of heaven is more materialistic but no less splendid than that of the great

¹ See Longfellow's translation, Canto XXXI, lines 1-27.

Italian. He pictures it as a place builded of precious stones, flooded with light, and everywhere made beautiful with trees, rivers, and clustering flowers. In the centre is the throne of God and all about are the hosts of angels, who, clothed in robes of dazzling white and equipped with harps of gold, busy themselves with chanting the eternal praises of the Most High.

Looking reverent

. . . they bow, and to the ground
With solemn adoration down they cast
Their crowns, inwove with amarant and gold—
Now in loose garlands thick thrown off, the bright
Pavement, that like a sea of jasper shown,
Impurpled with celestial roses smiled.
Then, crowned again, their golden harps they took—
. . . and with preamble sweet
Of charming symphony they introduce
Their sacred song, and waken raptures high
No voice exempt, no voice but well could join
Melodious part; such concord is in Heaven.¹

Such are some of the more familiar pictures which have been conceived and drawn of the future world! Nobody can survey these ideas, I believe, without being impressed at once with their striking, almost monotonous, similarity. Pagan or Christian in origin, it makes little difference! They are all so much alike as hardly to be distinguished from one another. Read in immediate succession, for example, Plato's descrip-

¹ See *Paradise Lost*, Book III, lines 349-71.

tion of heaven in the *Phaedo*, Mohammed's in the *Koran*, and St. John's in *Revelation*, and who that is not already familiar with them can tell the one from the other, or grade one as superior to another in spiritual meaning? From long association of Mohammedanism with much that is bad morally, at least from the point of view of our western ethics, we instinctively shrink from the paradise of the *Koran*, but wherein, on the whole, is this heaven worse than that depicted in the Apocalypse? And if, on the basis of reasonable probability merely, we were called upon to choose between the heaven of Milton and the heaven of Plato, who of us would choose that of the Puritan as in any marked degree the superior of the two? However humiliating it may be, from our Christian standpoint, to confess it, candour still compels us to recognize that all of these descriptions of immortality are in the same general class of pietistic speculation, and that the judgment which is visited upon one must, in all consistency, be visited upon all.

III

And what must this judgment be? Are we to suppose today that the immortal life is anything like what is presented in these various conceptions of our pagan and Christian progenitors?

First of all, it must be noted that all these heavens are limited in their character, and thus

inconsistent with any true doctrine of universalism. The Happy Hunting-Grounds of the redskin are open only to the warrior of prowess, who can deck his belt with the scalps of his fallen enemies. Valhalla is closed to all who have not met a glorious death upon the field of battle. The Mohammedan paradise is likewise restricted to the faithful. And the Christian heaven is reserved for the hosts of the redeemed. All this, of course, involves a theory of conditional immortality. Hell and heaven here go together as the natural complements of one another. And as we have rejected the doctrine of hell as untenable from the materialistic point of view, so also must we reject these ideas of heaven. We must seek a new conception of the world to come, if only for the sake of having something which shall be open, without conditions, to all the sons and daughters of men.

In the second place, we must notice the essential unreality of these pictures of the future. It is as difficult to believe that these conceptions of heaven are true, as we have already found it difficult to believe that the corresponding conceptions of hell are true. Details are not lacking, to be sure. On the contrary, it is amazing to see the extent and accuracy of the knowledge which men have again and again assumed to possess of this realm which lies so far beyond our mortal ken. The description of the "new Jerusalem" in *Revelation* has all the intricate aspects of a builder's blue-print! Dante's *Paradiso*, like his *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, can be

mapped as carefully as any section of our earth! In Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*, we find an account of the life to come well-nigh as minute as any that has yet been given of the life that now is. But these details are utterly lacking in verisimilitude! They are not such as are recorded by a traveller describing a distant land which he has explored, or by a naturalist describing some department of animal life which he has observed; but are rather such as are set down by a romancer describing some happy realm of dreams. We are reminded in reading these stories, not at all of Asa Gray's *Principles of Botany*, or Louis Agassiz's *Field Notes of a Geologist*, or Charles Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*, but inevitably of Scheherezade's tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*, or Andrew Lang's multicoloured fairy books. Everything has the air of unreality. In an age when anything was deemed possible—when tales of hideous dragons in the western seas, of huge rocs on mountain tops and in ravines, of monstrous men with heads deep-set between their shoulders, of witches bestriding the air and ghosts besetting hearthstones, were heard and accepted without dispute—this fact was of little concern. It was as natural to believe these narratives of the future world as it was to believe a hundred and one things which were told about the commonest facts of daily life. But now all this is changed! The mythological habit of mind has yielded place to the scientific. Today we demand observed facts

first of all, and, in the absence of such facts, hypotheses founded upon rational probabilities. The modern man infinitely prefers uncertainty and flat ignorance to any illusions of the imagination, however attractive. Hence the discredit which has fallen upon such conceptions of the immortal life as these which I have mentioned!

But even though the unreality of these ideas were not so obvious, we should still be tempted to question their validity, if only because of their crass materialism. How can our essentially spiritual existence, we say, be lived amid surroundings so exclusively "of the earth, earthy?" Thus note how heaven is always described as a distinct locality or place. With the redskins it is an island or plain, situated beyond the western verge of the horizon. With the Norseman it is a hall or castle, located above the clouds. The Elysian Fields of the Greeks were far distant in lands beyond the sunset, while the Islands of the Blest were placed on the extreme border of the world by the bounds of the encircling sea. Plato's heaven is nothing more nor less than a duplication, on a grander and more perfect scale, of our present abode. The Mohammedan paradise is a series of beautiful gardens. The heaven of St. John is a city, composed of buildings and streets, and girt about with walls. These future realms, that is, are all definite places, which could be plainly marked upon a map of the universe, if such a thing were available.—And what kind of places are they?

Hopelessly materialistic in every feature! Gold and silver in abundance—precious stones as common as flowers—rivers and trees, milk and honey, everywhere! Could anything be more sordid, and therefore more debasing, than these ideas of the life to come? Could there be any more extraordinary combination than the Christian ethics of temperance, self-privation, and even self-mortification, and the Christian apocalypse of complete satisfaction of animal desire! The gardens and fruits and women of the Mohammedan paradise, we have long since learned to denounce in frank disgust. But wherein is this dream any more degrading in essence than the golden streets, jewel-studded gates, and rivers of water, of the "holy city" of *Revelation*!

It is when we come to this point that we begin to understand the origin of these conceptions of immortality, and thus to discover their real significance. What we have here, in these descriptions of eternal life, is nothing more nor less than a projection into the future of all that a particular group of people has most deeply yearned to realize and enjoy. Heaven, in other words, is conceived of simply as a place where all human wishes are to be gratified, and unalloyed happiness thus attained. As the famous line from the Rubaiyat puts it

Heaven is the vision of fulfilled desire.

This means that each particular heaven assumes inevitably the form of that particular kind of life

which each particular race of men thinks most ideal. Once discover what men most want and you have at the same time discovered their doctrine of heaven! Thus the North American Indian's consuming passion is the chase—hence his heaven is a great hunting-ground stocked with a never-ending supply of buffalo and deer. The Norseman, on the other hand, joys in fighting and feasting—hence his heaven is an uninterrupted succession of bloody battles by day and riotous banquets by night. The Moslem yearns for harems and gardens—hence his “bower” beneath the fragrant trees! And so also with Christianity! What Christian theologians and poets were trying to affirm, when they talked about walls of jasper and gates of pearl, about angels with spotless robes, about the ineffable flood of light which blazed about the redeemed, as they stood by the great white throne and poured forth their songs of praise to God, was that heaven was a place where every desire of the human heart for happiness was realized. Most men lived upon earth amid ugly and squalid conditions—heaven therefore would be a place of indescribable beauty and splendour; most men in their lifetime never saw any gold or silver or precious stones and regarded these as the rewards of kings—therefore would heaven be a place in which these wonders would be given to all, gold and silver in the streets like dirt in the common highways of the country, pearls in the gates like the iron bolts in the great portals

of the market-town; most men upon the earth laboured from early morning till late at night, until the back was weary and the feet lame—therefore in the future life would there be perfect rest, as upon the Sabbath, when weary men laid aside their toil and went to the cathedral to worship God; no man upon earth ever laid hold upon his ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty—therefore would the future life bring to every longing soul the understanding of perfect truth, the revelation of perfect goodness, and the vision of perfect beauty. Everywhere and always has immortality been thus conceived as the realization of all for which men have fondly yearned and earnestly striven in this present life. It is to be the fulfilment of all desire, the satisfaction of all need, the ending of all disappointment and disaster. Not what is but what ought to be!—not what is true but what is desirable!—this has been the standard of all judgments and the determination of all conclusions in this field!

IV

It is such considerations as these which show how vain are all these traditional ideas of heaven as answers to our question, What will immortality be like? It will be like something, no doubt,—however remote the resemblance—but it will most assuredly not be like anything that has thus far been described. We know, if we know anything

at all, that these heavens cannot exist. And what is more, we also know that, even though they could exist, we should be sorry to find them to be true. For they are as much a violation of our modern sense of value as they are of our equally modern sense of reality. These conceptions are "the stuff that dreams are made of," and therefore must be at once and forever put aside!

But must not every conception of the future be necessarily of this same "stuff" and, as a consequence, worthless as an answer to our inquiry? Any idea of the life beyond the grave, to be acceptable to the modern mind, must of course be based upon facts. But how can such an idea be based upon facts, when the subject-matter with which it deals lies confessedly beyond the range of present conscious experience? Are we not, after all, embarked upon a hopeless quest? There are undoubtedly a multitude of facts in this great universe of God which the mortal mind can never hope to unveil, for sheer lack of infinite powers to compass infinite problems; and is not this question of the nature of the immortal life manifestly one of these transcendent facts? And if this be the case, is it not the part of wisdom to confess our ignorance, and give up our search for a solution? Does there not always come a time, in every field of inquiry, when the attitude of agnosticism is not only wise but virtuous? Why not frankly confess that we can never hope to know what immortality is like, and content ourselves with the thought

that at least it *is*! In pushing this matter unduly, shall we not be guilty of what Herbert Spencer rightly calls "the impiety of the pious" which pretends to sound the deepest mysteries of being and comprehend the farthest purposes of God. And shall we not be forced in the end to the humiliating confession of Job:

I uttered that I understood not;
 Things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

Wherefore I abhor myself,
 And repent in dust and ashes.¹

At first sight this objection seems to be unanswerable! It is indeed true that heaven lies beyond our experience, and therefore outside the range of first-hand knowledge. To confess our ignorance to this extent is our only honest course! But even though we admit that the actual facts of the next life are beyond our direct observation, we must never forget that the facts of *this life* are always before us, and give us knowledge not only of themselves but of relations and co-ordinations with all the rest of the universal order of which they are a part. Using such facts as these for our basis of discussion, may we not reason, by the familiar processes of logical deduction, to the facts pertaining to the immortal life which, although manifestly beyond the range of experience, are just as manifestly not beyond the range of

¹ *Job* xlii: 3, 6.

inference. Just as the astronomer, for example, infers not only the existence but the weight, direction of movement, rapidity of flight, etc., of stars which he has never seen, because of the perturbations noted in the stars which flame within his telescope—just as the physicist infers the composition of the material substance of planets unvisited because of the dispersal of the light rays by the spectroscope in his laboratory—so may we not infer not only the existence, but something of the character, of the future life, from the facts which are observed and experienced in this present life? If heaven exists, in other words, will it not be closely enough related to the reality that is about us, to enable us to catch foregleams, however dim, of what will some day be disclosed as the full glory of eternity?

V

In order to see the significance of this thought, we must recall one fact which has all too often been neglected or forgotten. I refer to the fact that, as beings destined to what we call immortality, we are just as much immortal now, at this very instant, as we ever shall be in the future! Ordinarily we have thought of life upon this side of the grave as one thing and life beyond the other side of the grave as quite another thing. Immortality, in other words, has been taken by us to mean a new kind of existence, upon which we are to enter

when this present, and different existence is done. Between the two realms of today and tomorrow there has been thought to be an absolute break, which is spanned by no bridge of necessary relation. Shakespeare expresses this thought in his *Measure for Measure*, when he makes the provost say to Claudio, on the eve of his execution,

Look, here's the warrant, Claudio, for thy death.
'Tis now dead midnight, and by eight tomorrow
Thou must be made immortal.

And of course exactly the same idea is conveyed by St. Paul, in his phrase, "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

Now we only have to look at this conception for a moment, in order to see how impossible it is. "The future state," says Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his essay on *Immortality*, "is an illusion for the ever-present state."¹ If immortality means anything at all, it means not that we are immortal tomorrow, or whenever death may come upon us, but that we are immortal at this very instant, while we are flushed with the full vigour of our days. Nothing could be farther from the truth than to say of Claudio, for example, that he would "*be made* immortal by eight tomorrow!" This man was immortal when the provost was addressing him, or not at all; the execution then announced could no more make him immortal than it could,

¹ See *Letters and Social Aims*, page 281.

on the other hand, destroy his spirit and hurl him to annihilation. Eternal life, from the very nature of the conception itself, includes not simply the future, but the past as well, and most certainly also the present. For eternity embraces all time. Strictly speaking, it knows no future and no past, but only an unbegun, unending, ever-enduring present. It means not yesterday, nor yet tomorrow, but always today. As Petrarch puts it, in one of his great sonnets:

Nothing is there to come, and nothing past,
But an eternal Now does always last.

Immortality, therefore, is something more than a future life. It is in the truest sense of the word a present reality. "Now are we the sons of God," says the apostle, with the emphasis upon "now!" Even now is the glory of the spiritual inheritance ours; even now are we in the midst of that eternal life for the coming of which we pray; even now are we entered upon that immortality which we have long discerned but dimly in the future!

All this is true, no doubt! The present life is assuredly just as much a part of "our eternity" as the future life. But even so, how "doth it yet appear what we shall be?" The fact that eternity includes all time, does not necessarily imply that there is no break between these two forms of life, the one earthly and the other heavenly! We have no evidence that, because life here and life over there are only two parts of one common immortal-

ity, therefore they are the same in character! As well argue that the prenatal months of human existence are the same as the post-natal years, and that, if a child had consciousness within its mother's womb, it could anticipate the conditions of its progress after birth! Does not birth constitute an absolute breach; and is it not fair to argue that death, after the familiar analogy, does exactly the same!

So it would seem!—if it were not for this very analogy which has just been used! For if the process of development in the animal organism from prenatal to post-natal existence illustrates anything at all, it illustrates that great law of life, the discovery and demonstration of which constitutes one of the triumphs of modern science—the Law of Continuity!

On the surface of things we seem to see nothing but the evidences of discontinuity. Objects appear detached and countable. Atom is separated from atom, planet from planet, species from species. Careful study, however, is more and more tending to show that all these isolations are illusory—that between atoms and planets and species runs an unbroken line of continuity, which binds them into one. If objects seem to be severed from one another, it is only because the intermediate forms have disappeared or have not yet been discovered. Says Sir Oliver Lodge upon this very point in his *Presidential Address* to the British Association for 1913:

We have no reason to postulate anything but continuity for space and time. We cut them up for convenience sake, and those units we can count; but there is really nothing atomic or countable about the things themselves. . . . We ought clearly to discriminate between things themselves and our mode of measuring them. . . . It is an ancient and discarded fable that complications introduced by . . . an observer are real complications belonging to the outer universe.¹

This Law of Continuity finds its supreme illustration, of course, in evolution. "Continuity," says Sir Oliver Lodge again,² "is the backbone of evolution . . . no artificial boundaries or demarcations between species—a continuous chain of heredity from far below the amœba up to man." At first, in spite of the declarations of the thoroughgoing evolutionists, this unbroken line of biological continuity was strenuously denied. The old superstition of unrelated species still survived in modified form. Darwin's failure to find "the missing link," as it was called, was a perpetual theme of jest when it was not used as a serious argument. Huxley and his fellow-champions of Darwinism had to spend much time, and use up much printer's ink, in expounding what should have been the obvious reasons why intermediary forms of life have vanished, even from the geological deposits. James Martineau, in his famous controversy with Herbert Spencer, remained absolutely unconvinced that continuity could be es-

¹ See *Continuity*, pages 44-45.

² *Ibid.*, page 29.

tablished between animal and man, between vegetable and animal, and least of all between mineral and vegetable. But slowly, step by step, the faith of the early prophets has been justified. Gap after gap has been bridged or closed, until to-day the line from inorganic matter up to thinking man is universally regarded as unbroken.

And what does all this mean, now, as regards the problem of what immortality will be like? Is not the application obvious? The line of continuous development from form to form and from species to species, which has been running all through this earthly life, must, if there be a life beyond, run on through that as well. The next life, in other words, can be nothing more than the next step beyond this present life, and analogous to this, therefore, in form and feature, even as one species of organic life is analogous to the one which is just below it. No corollary of the Law of Continuity is more valuable to the seeker after knowledge than the means which it gives him of anticipating, from the characteristics of the species or form of life which he has seen, the characteristics of the next higher species or form which he has not seen. He knows that there must be no absolute break; that the line of development must move in a certain direction and must manifest certain relations. The present stage of development makes certain next steps inevitable, and therefore the scientist dares to describe these next steps even before he has discovered them. Witness Huxley's

daring description of the missing link in the chain of development of the horse, and the confirmation of this anticipatory description by the specimen later unearthed by Professor Marsh, of Yale University! All of which means, to return to our original illustration, that the unborn child, were it possessed of consciousness, would be able to foresee and describe the conditions of its post-natal growth, even as the skilled naturalist can take the foetus and point out the embryonic anticipations of all later developments—and that we today should be similarly able to foresee and describe the life that is to come! That this life is the next step in the evolution of the soul should be all the data that we need for speculation.

VI

Working upon this basis, I venture to prophesy that life beyond the grave will be in its essence very much like what life is here in its physical environment—namely, a growth, or evolution. Heaven is not to be some marvellous wonderland, where growth is to cease in the sudden fulfilment of desire, but is rather to be a condition in which the soul, at last delivered from the encumbrance of its earthly frame, will continue to unfold and blossom, only under more favourable conditions than here are ever known. Heaven, in other words, is simply the next step in the evolution of the spiritual life. We shall begin there just where we left off here—our growth will be resumed at just the

point, high or low, where it was suspended by the dissolution of the body. When we open our eyes in the future world, we shall awake to find ourselves just what we have made ourselves here—not what our friends or enemies think we are, nor even what we ourselves think we ought to be, but only what we are in reality as the result of the thoughts and deeds, the purposes and motives, of this present existence. The morning after death will be exactly like the morning after sleep, so far at least as the inner life is concerned. Where we stopped yesterday, we shall begin today, as though nothing at all had happened. It is just as if we were climbing a long ladder round by round, and suddenly, after years of climbing, came to a closed door which seemed to bar our way, and then, all at once, the door opens, and we pass through and go on climbing round by round, on the same ladder, with the single difference that we are now one story higher than before.¹

But what kind of a place is this heaven? To begin with, I am tempted to believe that heaven is not a place at all—neither a city, nor a garden, nor even a star, but in the strictest sense of the word, a state or a condition. Heaven is a continuation of this life, it must be remembered, in a

¹ In a recently reported mediumistic communication from the late W. T. Stead, the victims of the *Titanic* were described as not recognizing that anything had happened when they awoke in the next world. Stead had to tell them where they were. This is the most plausible word from the great beyond that has ever come to my attention.

spiritual and not in a material sense. When the body dies, material conditions will be ended once for all. Just as we will be through with eyes, hands, and stomachs, so will we be through with houses, cities, rivers, mountains, and gardens. Localities, with their physical dimensions and bounds, will have disappeared! Physical senses with their limitations and weaknesses will have gone! Only a state of pure existence will be left! We shall be souls as free as air—entities not of matter but of thought, emotion, will! All this is well-nigh impossible to explain, as we have no language in which to clothe our thought. But Swedenborg came as near as anybody to conveying this idea with accuracy when, in his *Heaven and Hell*, he said that, in the next world, no such thing as space is known at all!

But if a condition and not a place—what kind of a condition? Following again the suggestion given us by our Law of Continuity, I believe that the life of the soul in heaven will be exactly what it has been here upon earth, minus only its material restrictions. For example, the old doctrine of heaven was saturated with the idea of rest and idleness. Nor is it difficult to sympathize with this idea, when we remember the sweet release which death has ever given to the life-long labours of weary men. But in itself this conception must be regarded as not only irrational, but unworthy; and a moment's thought as to the meaning of perpetual inaction will show us also that it would

be not a blessing, but an intolerable curse. To my mind, the soul will be as hard at work in the next life as in this present one. This does not mean that the masses of mankind will still go on breaking their backs for the benefit of the privileged few. It does not mean toil-worn, labour-stained, heart-weary men. It does not mean physical labour at all. All that is implied is that our souls shall be busy with those activities of the spirit which radiate joy as naturally as the sun its light. The work of overcoming sin, of gaining knowledge, of conquering doubts, of making explorations and discoveries, of realizing ideals, of seeking truths,—this shall be our tasking. And that this is infinitely better than any such state of idleness as that pictured in the heavens of ancient speculation should be obvious to every mind. John Hay gives rough but impressive expression to this thought, in his famous ballad *Little Breeches*, where he describes the miraculous finding of five-year-old little Gabe in the snow-bound sheepfold.

How did he git thar? Angels!

He could never have walked in that storm.

They jist scooped down and toted him

To whar it was safe and warm.

And I think that saving a little child,

And fotching him to his own,

Is a darned sight better business

Than loafing around the Throne.

Then, in the old traditions, heaven was always represented as a place where growth was to come

to an abrupt end in the absolute fulfilment of all human desire. St. John, Dante, Milton, as we have seen, describe heaven as the full realization of all imaginable bliss. But here again is a conception which vitiates not only the demands of logical scientific deduction from observed facts, but also all standards of ethical idealism. The law of life, so far as we have been able to ascertain it, is development, progression. Especially is this true in the life of the spirit. The deepest-rooted characteristic of the soul is its passion for the unknown and the unseen. The whole history of human thought demonstrates the truth that man's deepest longing is to know. And is it conceivable that, in a future life which has any remotest resemblance to reality, this longing will be quenched, or saturated with fulfilment? Nothing more to discover, to learn, to achieve!—would not this condition transform heaven into hell, and make eternal life little better than eternal death! Like Alexander, we want more worlds to conquer; and like the Macedonian also, we derive no satisfaction from the thought that we have conquered all! Heaven, if it is heaven, must be a state of progress. The realm of the mysterious must be as vast and baffling as it is here. There, as here, the joy of life must be wrapped in the joy of combat against the unknown and unknowable. "Just as one might climb a mountain and get no nearer to the moon," says Dr. M. J. Savage, in a sermon on Immortality, "or sail the sea forever, with his eye

upon, but never overtaking, a star—so one will climb up ever unto new heights of beauty and glory and love of God, but never find an end.”

And lastly, there is that most intimate question of all, Shall we meet and know our “loved and lost” in this future world? In order to answer this, we must ask the important preliminary question as to what we mean by knowing a person?

First of all, of course, we know a human being by his physical attributes and bodily actions. I know my friend, from all other persons in the world, by the size of his frame, the contour of his figure, the features of his countenance, the colour of his hair, the radiance of his smile, the clasp of his hand. Nor indeed do I have to see these distinctive features of his appearance in order to recognize him—for if I know him well, I can distinguish him from other persons by the sound of his voice, or the nervous tread of his step. Nor do I even have to hear him, or be in any personal contact with him whatsoever. I can still recognize his presence, without even having seen or heard him, by evidence of his personal habits, or his individual handiwork, or his way of doing things. This pipe on the table, this letter half-written, this decoration on the wall, this method of laying a coat across a chair—all these are things which bring me to a knowledge of my friend. We know a human being, therefore, by his physical attri-

butes, bodily actions, or personal handiwork. The body and the things handled by the body constitute revelations of the soul.

Now if this be all that is meant by knowing a person, it is obvious that reunion with our friends in another world is impossible. For these distinctive features of body and environment, by which the presence of our loved ones is manifested to us here, are plainly enough physical, and cannot therefore be carried over into the future. If our longing, like that of Tennyson, is to experience a second time

. . . the touch of a vanished hand
And the sound of a voice that is still,

that longing must ever go unsatisfied. The hand is vanished, and the voice is stilled, forever. If reunion with our loved ones depend on either, that reunion will never be enjoyed!

But is the knowledge of our friends, which thus depends upon our familiarity with physical manifestations, the only knowledge, or even the true knowledge? On the contrary, is it not only the beginning of a knowledge which, in the end, far transcends all the conditions of this material environment? The fact of the matter is, human beings are something more than a physical combination of hands and feet and heads. These bodies are useful garments to wear, or comfortable tenements in which to live, or handy tools with which to do our work. But when we come to

the question of what we really are in ourselves, we find that there is something deeper and higher involved than anything that the body is, or has, or does. In the last analysis, we are not bodies at all, but souls—and any knowledge which we may have of one another, if it is true knowledge, must be a knowledge not of bodies but of souls. A dog can know a person, in so far as knowledge is nothing more than a matter of recognition of physical attributes. But we only have to think of such a thing as a dog knowing a man, to see how true it is that real knowledge far transcends anything that can be reached or analysed by the physical senses of the body. Only persons can know persons, for only a soul can know a soul. Any knowledge which is true knowledge takes us out of the realm of matter into the realm of spirit. And it is because the realm of spirit constitutes a phase of experience to which few of us ever climb, that this true knowledge is one of the rarest things in the world. Most of us never know more than a comparatively few persons in the course of a whole lifetime; and some persons there are who are so above and beyond us in moral stature and spiritual attainment, that it is as impossible for us to know them as it is for us to mount to the blazing splendour of the sun. How many persons were there who really knew William Shakespeare? Thousands there were who recognized him as he walked the streets of Elizabethan London, hundreds who met him in the playhouses, scores who “knew him,”

to use the common phrase, as he sat in the Mermaid Tavern. But out of all these scores and hundreds and thousands, there was only the little inner circle of the Mermaid comrades—Jonson, Marlow, Fletcher—who really knew him—knew him in the sense that their hearts could sing with his, and their minds mount to the peopled world wherein he lived. And so with Socrates, in Athens! Was there a man in all that ancient city who did not know the familiar figure of the philosopher as he walked its streets and loitered in its squares and porticoes?—the large bald head, the protruding eyes, the flat nose, the thick lips, the big body balanced on its bandy-legs like a waddling pelican, to quote the vivid but unflattering picture of Aristophanes! Everybody knew Socrates, we would have been told, if we had lived at this time and were making inquiries as to his whereabouts. Yes—everybody knew Socrates; and yet nobody of all the Athenians really knew him, save only Plato, whose soul alone could mount to the heights of vision, where dwelt the soul of his illustrious teacher, and live with him in the pure atmosphere of thought. And so, in an even more extreme degree, with Jesus! How the multitudes thronged his path and hung upon his words! How eagerly sat the disciples at his feet, and pondered his inspired words! How well they knew this man of Nazareth, who talked of the Father, and appealed for the coming of the Kingdom. And yet of all the men and women who “knew Jesus,” from John

the well-beloved disciple down, was there one who really knew him as he was?

Knowledge, as we may perhaps begin now to see, is an infinitely rarer and finer thing than we had any idea of when we spoke of knowing a person through the seeing of our eyes and the hearing of our ears. Knowledge, in the last analysis, has nothing to do with physical attributes or bodily powers. If we would know a person as he is, and not merely as he appears to be, we must go behind the body, which conceals and distorts quite as often as it reveals, and by some magical influences of the spirit, lay bare the secret and sacred places of the soul. Knowledge of a person does not mean knowledge of hair, eyes, and voice, but knowledge of hopes and fears, desires and aspirations. It means tearing aside, or penetrating within, or rising above, the entangling encumbrances of the flesh, and meeting heart with heart, and spirit with spirit, in the blessed intimacies of truth and love. It means being caught up and transfigured by mutual sympathies and affections so that thoughts may be exchanged, desires understood, and sacrifices shared. It is all summed up in the statement that the essence of knowledge is not physical recognition but spiritual communion. Those only could know Shakespeare, who could see with Shakespeare; those only know Socrates, who could think with Socrates; those only know Jesus, who could "take up the cross" with Jesus! True is the insight of Thomas Carlyle, and sound

his judgment, when he says, in his *Essay on the Death of Goethe*, "Love is ever the beginning of knowledge, as fire is of light."

Now here is what is really involved in our knowledge of a person, and here is the suggestion that we need as to the possibility of our knowing our loved ones in the world to come. Those whom we know only as we know "this goodly frame, the earth," by the physical lineaments which they present to our gaze, will disappear from our ken after death as completely as the earth itself. But those into the secret of whose inmost being we have penetrated, will be found again, however wide the separation of the years. Soul will call to soul, and answer from each to each will never fail. Spirit will commune with spirit in that sweet language of mystic intuition which needs no words to speak its meaning. We have but to see with the single eye of the heart, to know with that knowledge which surpasseth the apprehension of the sense, to love "in spirit and in truth"—and behold, our own shall evermore be ours! As well think of snapping the chains of gravitation that bind the planets to the central sun, as of severing these bonds which bind the hearts of men. Of all that truly love, it must be said, what one who truly loved first said of her beloved and herself:

Men could not part us with their worldly jars,
Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend;
Our hands would touch for all the mountain-bars:

And, heaven being rolled between us in the end,
We should but vow the faster for the stars.¹

VII

Such is what immortality will be like, so far at least as we can judge from the facts of present life! There is no break between the two existences, no startling change, no awful metamorphosis! Life simply continues, goes on there where it left off here, mounts one step higher on the long, long climb upward toward the eternal. So natural is it all, that we can well believe that Henry Ward Beecher is right in his surmise that, "when we say here a man is dead, it is said there, behold, a man is born."

In the second act of Maeterlinck's fairy play, *The Blue Bird*, the two children, Mytyl and Tytyl, are represented as going to the Land of Memory, to see their grandfather and grandmother, both long since dead. As the brother and sister look about them, they notice that everything looks strangely familiar.

Tytyl: (looking first at his grandmother and then at his grandfather)—You haven't changed, grandad, not a bit, not a bit. . . . And granny hasn't changed a bit either. . . . But you're better looking. . . .

Gaffer Tyl: Well, we feel all right. . . . We have stopped growing older. . . .

¹ See Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, No. ii.

Tyltyl: (looking around him with delight)—Nothing is changed, everything is in its old place! . . . Only everything is prettier! . . . There is the clock with the big hand which I broke the point off. . . .

Gaffer Tyl: And here is the soup-tureen you chopped a corner off. . . .

Tyltyl: And here is the hole which I made in the door, the day I found the gimlet. . . .

Gaffer Tyl: Yes, you've done some damage in your time! And here is the plum-tree in which you were so fond of climbing. It still has its fine red plums.

Tyltyl: But they are finer than ever! . . . There's Kiki, whose tail I cut off with Pauline's scissors. . . . He hasn't changed either.

Gaffer Tyl: (sententiously) — No, nothing changes here.

Thus, in the simple language of childhood, does the Belgian seer interpret the truth, which we have been trying to make plain, of what the immortal life is like. All is the same—nothing changes, save only to grow better.

CHAPTER IX

IS IMMORTALITY DESIRABLE?

‘It is conceivable that the immortal hope may be mistaken, but of one thing we may be sure, that it would be a good thing if it were true. If we define immortality in the Christian sense, it is a thing devoutly to be desired.’—William Adams Brown, in *The Christian Hope*, page 196.

I

IN all that we have been saying thus far, we have been taking it for granted that immortality can be regarded as desirable. Certainly this would seem, at first sight at least, to be a reasonably safe assumption. Indeed, would it not be almost “the height of the ridiculous” to raise any serious question about the matter? Would it not be as absurd for a theologian to ask if men desire immortality, as for a botanist to ask if the flower desires the life-quickening advent of the spring, or for the mother to ask if her child desires the coming of another day? Think, for example, of how the Christian church, for nearly two thousand years, has held before the hearts of men, overwhelmed by the toils of existence and bruised by its pathetic tragedies, the hope of an eternal life beyond the

grave—and think of how mankind has welcomed the glad hope and yearned for its speedy realization. Immortality has been looked forward to by myriads of stricken hearts as a new and better life, which shall bring rest to the weary, freedom to the oppressed, light to those who sit in darkness, joy for sorrow, beauty for ashes, the garment of praise for the robe of heaviness. It has been longed for by those who have “loved and lost,” as the time when their dear ones shall be met again and separation be ended. It has been hailed by the prophets of all peoples as the time when the first heaven and first earth, so full of injustice, unrighteousness, and hate, shall pass away, and a new heaven and a new earth shall come, where justice shall be established, righteousness made known, and love enthroned supreme in the hearts of men. And it has been seen in glad vision by the dreaming mystics of every age and place as the time when earth shall be consigned to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes, and the soul of man, shorn of the image of the earthly and bearing the image of the heavenly, shall meet face to face with God. Is immortality desirable? Why, it is the one universal, unending, and unvarying desire of humanity; it is the one great instinct of the heart; it is the one supreme aspiration of the soul. We want to be immortal, and therefore, if the pragmatist be right, we shall be immortal! Thus Addison, in the famous passage of his *Cato*, where he makes one of his characters to say, in lonely meditation upon the issues of life and death:

It must be so—

Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,
This hungering after immortality?

Or whence this secret dread, and inward horror,
Of falling into nought? . . .

II

No sooner, however, is this question of man's desire for immortality raised in a calm, scientific spirit of inquiry, as Mr. G. Lowes Dickinson raised it, for example, in his Harvard *Lecture* of 1911,¹ than we are suddenly awakened to the remarkable fact that our assumption, that all men desire to be immortal, is supported by no evidence and has been very generally accepted only because it has never been seriously investigated. Undoubtedly there have always been men who have looked forward to eternal life with joyful anticipation—the whole history of the Christian Church is eloquent of this fact. But to say that all men have shared this “hungering after immortality” is quite a different proposition, as we have already seen. It would be a manifest exaggeration to assert that it has been quite as common in the past for men to be indifferent to the future life as to desire it. But to say that this attitude of indifference has not been infrequent in the past, and has sensibly increased within recent years, as the influence of Christianity has diminished and the influence of

¹ See *Is Immortality Desirable?*

the scientific habit of mind has slowly grown, would be keeping well within the truth. A great number of persons today, so far from desiring immortality as a conscious psychological experience, can be divided, in their attitude upon this question, into four classes.

In the first place, there is that class already referred to,¹ in which the overwhelming majority of people at the present time are rightly to be placed, and which Dr. William Osler, in *Science and Immortality*, aptly describes as the "Laodiceans." These are the persons who are "neither hot nor cold." They are indifferent to the question, just as they are indifferent to the question of the flora and fauna of Patagonia, or the habits of earth-worms, or the canals in Mars. Neither among the educated and refined, nor among the masses, says Dr. Osler, "do we find any ardent desire for a future life. It is not a subject of drawing-room conversation—the man whose habit it is to buttonhole his acquaintances and inquire earnestly after their souls, is shunned like the Ancient Mariner—and even among the clergy it is not thought polite to refer to so delicate a topic except officially from the pulpit." . . . Even at the hour of death itself, Dr. Osler tells us, there is this same prevailing indifference.

I have careful records [he says], of about five hundred death-beds, studied particularly with refer-

¹ See back, Chapter II., page 23.

ence to the sensations of the dying. . . . Eleven showed mental apprehension, two positive terror, one expressed spiritual exaltation, one bitter remorse. The great majority gave no sign one way or the other; like their birth, their death was a sleep and a forgetting.¹

In the second place, there are those persons who have appeared in every age, who are not at all indifferent to this question, but who, so far from desiring an immortal life, regard such a prospect with abhorrence and aversion. These are the persons whom we usually call pessimists—persons who regard the present life as terrible beyond words to describe, who assume that any conceivable future life will be of much the same character as this, and who affirm therefore that absolute extinction after death is the only thing that any sane man can desire. These men believe, upon exact philosophic grounds, that existence in itself is bad—and this conclusion of course applies just as much to existence beyond the grave as to existence upon this side of the grave. Buddhism, the classic religion of pessimism, is saturated with this idea, and therefore finds its eternal salvation in Nirvana, or extinction. Schopenhauer, the founder of the modern school of philosophic pessimism, and always much under Buddhist influences, is the typical example of this attitude of mind in our own time. "To desire immortality," says this great thinker, "is to desire the eternal perpetuation of

¹ See *Science and Immortality*, page 19.

a great mistake. Each individual existence is a definite mistake, a blunder, something that would better not have been, and the object of existence should be to end it."¹ Therefore does Schopenhauer look forward to death with eager anticipation, not because, like the Christian martyr or the medieval mystic, he regards death as the gate of heaven, but rather because he regards death as bringing the "absolute annihilation" of the individual life and therefore the end of the supreme misery of existence.

A third attitude toward this question of immortality is one which has been taken by many of the noblest minds. I refer to the attitude of those who, not indifferent to the question, like the average man upon the street, have reflected upon it, as one of the stupendous problems of human life; and, not averse to existence, like the pessimist, as "evil continually," have lived this life to the full and got much joy and satisfaction out of it; and have yet come to the deliberate conclusion, as the result of inward reflection and outward experience, that oblivion after death is to be preferred to continued life. These men have all found life good and sweet; they have had burdens to carry and sorrows to endure, but still have found more good than evil in the world, more joy than misery; they have many of them achieved certain things for the greater welfare and prosperity of mankind, but, after long careers of struggle and endeavour, of

¹ See *The World as Will*, vol. ii., page 561.

mingled failure and success, have simply had enough of life, and believe that the sweetest boon that can come at the moment of death is the boon of oblivion and repose, just as the sweetest boon that can come at the close of a hard day's work is the boon of sleep. So far from desiring immortality, these men positively yearn for extinction, just as the strong man yearns for sleep when the night follows upon the day. This is the attitude expressed by Professor Wilhelm Ostwald, in his book on *Immortality*. He tells us that, as he looks into his own mind "with all the frankness and scientific objectivity" which he can apply to so personal a question, he finds no horror connected with the thought of death and ultimate extinction.

Of course [he says], it is objectionable to suffer illness or pain, and there are beside still many things which I should like to do or to experience before I die. . . . But after I have lived out the span of my life, the bodily ending will seem a perfectly natural thing, and it will be more a feeling of relief than one of sorrow that will come in watching the end.¹

Mr. G. Bernard Shaw, presents another striking example of this same viewpoint:

I have a strong feeling [he says], that I shall be glad when I am dead and done for—scrapped at last to make room for somebody better, cleverer, more perfect than myself.²

¹ See *Individuality and Immortality*, pages 62–63.

² See *George Bernard Shaw: His Life and Works*, by Archibald Henderson, page 484. See further Shaw's last publication,

This is the attitude set forth also by Walter Savage Landor, in the famous epitaph which he wrote for himself:

I strove with none, for none was worth my strife,
 Nature I loved and next to nature art,
 I warmed both hands before the fire of life,
 It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

And as a climax to this whole interpretation of existence, we have the calm assertion of the great scientist, Elie Metchnikoff, that this relief that life was over and this reluctance to continue living on indefinitely into the future would be the feeling of us all, if we were not habitually cut off before the natural term of life had ended—a term which he puts, in his book entitled, *The Prolongation of Life*, as high as one hundred and fifty years!¹

Finally, there is a fourth class of persons who, for still another reason, find the conception of immortality positively undesirable. I refer to that large class of persons in our own day who are wholly absorbed in the pressing problems of the world, and who are impatient of this longing for immortality which disarms people for practical service in the life that now is. It is here that

Misalliance: "If some devil were to convince us that our dream of personal immortality is no dream but a hard fact, such a shriek of despair would go up from the human race, as no other conceivable horror could provoke . . . After all, what man is capable of the insane self-conceit of believing that an eternity of himself would be tolerable even to himself."—Pages ix. x.

¹ See also *The Nature of Man*, chapters ix., x., xi.

Christianity has been so conspicuous an offender. Supremely interested in the life that may exist beyond the grave, it has been almost wholly neglectful of the life that we know exists upon this side of the grave. Absorbed in preparing men and women for the next world, it has forgotten to protect them in this world. Concerned primarily with saving people's souls in heaven, it has forgotten to save people's bodies on the earth. The desire of the typical Christian, in a word, for "things heavenly" has been so urgent, that it has inevitably led him to despise things earthly. Hence the ever-growing protest of our age, which is concerned first, last, and all the time with the now and here, against the whole conception of the immortal life! We are asked to banish this dream from our hearts—to turn our gaze from this deceptive will-o'-the-wisp! We do not know whether immortality is true or not, and in all probability we never shall know. So let us dismiss this fantastic hope of an eternal existence, and dedicate all that we have and are to the uplift and regeneration of the life that we see about us. The desirable thing is not continued life tomorrow, but perfect life today; not a life that is eternal in quantity but a life that is eternal in quality; not the finding of a kingdom of heaven over there, but the founding of a kingdom of heaven here. And we are reminded of the story of the saint of old, who was seen one day running through the streets with a torch in one hand and a pail of water in the other;

and, when asked what she was going to do, replied: "With the water I am going to extinguish the fires of hell, and with the torch I am going to burn the ramparts of heaven, that men may see this world alone, and do good for no other reason than the love of God!"

Now, it is when we consider these various classes of persons, all of which must be familiar to us in the ranges of our own experience, that we are forced to admit that there is little truth in the statement that all men desire immortality. Immortality is by no means the desirable thing in men's minds that we have somewhat carelessly assumed it was. Most men, as Dr. Osler and Mr. Dickinson both contend, seldom give the matter a moment's consideration, save perhaps under the stress of some cruel tragedy of death; and of those who do reflect upon the subject, many of the finest minds deliberately desire extinction and repose, with an exclusive focussing of their impulses upon the life that we now are living. It is this situation which forces upon our minds the inevitable question, Is immortality desirable? and although this question may seem, at first sight, to be a problem of pure speculation, not worth discussion, since men are surely destined either to immortality or to extinction, without regard as to whether or not they find their fate desirable, yet we may believe that there are certain practical conclusions following upon a sound decision of this problem which will justify us in seeking an answer to the question.

III

The first thought which comes into our minds, as we consider whether or not immortality is desirable, is that which Mr. Dickinson places in the forefront of his discussion—namely “that the desirability of a future life must depend upon its character, just as does the desirability of this one.”¹ And right here, let it be said, that if the future life turns out to be anything like what it has been described, through all the ages of Christian history, then we may well sincerely pray to be delivered from so dreadful a fate by the merciful blessing of extinction. Mark Twain wrote not only an amusing story but also a parable which was true to human nature, when he told his story of the old Yankee sea-captain who went to heaven and entered with joy unspeakable within its pearly gates. Here he was given his robe and crown and golden harp, according to the traditional programme, and assigned his task of singing hymns of praise and adoration unto God. For a time, we are assured, all went well; but little by little, this kind of life began to pall, and soon he was willing to do anything to escape from so terrible a place.² Dante, in his *Paradiso*, has undoubtedly given the most sublime description of the traditional Christian heaven that ever was conceived of by the mind of man, but just to read the *Paradiso* is

¹ See *Is Immortality Desirable?* page 14.

² See *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*.

tedious beyond words, and it is doubtful if there is any one of us who would really like to abide within the place which it describes in such glowing language. And this abhorrence, which we feel for a future life of this kind, is stirred not half so much by the imagery in which the Christian idea of heaven has taken shape, as by the unworthy motives and aspirations, of which this imagery is the crude and inadequate expression. What men have always thought that they have wanted in the next world, as we have seen, has been a heaven in which all desires will be gratified, and all disappointments, longings, and despairs removed. Therefore have they pictured immortality, in the figurative terms which we have described, as a condition in which labour and strife, struggle and search, regret and failure, will be once and forever at an end. All goals will at last be revealed, all summits scaled, all horizons bounded. Truth will be known, goodness achieved, justice established. The future life, in one word, will be only quiet, happiness, peace—the perfection of all imperfections and the completeness of all incompleteness.

Such have been the dreams of men for the life that is to come! But is it not obvious, after only a moment or two of serious consideration, that these ideals are the expression of tired bodies, disordered nerves, disillusioned minds, broken hearts, and not at all the expression of the best instincts of the human spirit? Who of us, who has really searched his soul and come to some sure knowledge of his

true self, would confess to a desire for an immortality of this kind? Who of us would care to live on even for a day, to say nothing of an eternity, if we had no goals to seek, no mountain peaks to climb? Who of us would care to survive the night, if struggles and toils were over, and all things possible achieved? Merely to linger on, through centuries and aeons of dull inaction, will be no blessing to the eager soul. Life is worth living here only because it has visions not yet revealed, and kingdoms that have not yet been brought in upon the earth. Take away the things we seek and struggle to accomplish, and you take away the very essence of life; and we find ourselves existing merely as exist the animals, who gaze upon no far horizons and never look upward to the stars. "If I had to choose," said Lessing, "between finding truth and seeking for truth, I would unhesitatingly choose the latter!" Such is life today! And as surely as life tomorrow will be only the extension of this life today, so surely will this present condition of desirability be continued. And here is the reason why men like Wilhelm Ostwald and Bernard Shaw, for example, have testified that they preferred extinction to immortality. They have in their minds this traditional and outworn conception of the future life as the completion and fulfilment of all activity, and they cannot endure the intolerable thought of such a dead and uninspiring existence. Seekers for truth all their days, they cannot conceive anything more terrible

than to find suddenly that every fact has been discovered and every problem solved. Men of ceaseless activity, they shrink from the thought of continuing inactive through an unbroken eternity of years. Devoted servants of an imperfect and ignorant humanity, they revolt from the idea of a life which involves no service "for others' sakes." Their lives lived to the limit and their work done to the uttermost, they desire not immortality but extinction. And who of us would question, from this point of view, the perfect wisdom of their choice!

IV

If this, therefore, is what immortality really means—and this is certainly what we have been taught for ages to believe!—then we must agree that we would have to answer our question in the negative—that immortality is not desirable!

But *is* this what immortality really means? On the contrary, have we not just seen, in the last chapter, that this is the one conception of immortality which is not admissible? Did not every consideration there point us to the conclusion that the immortal life, if it be at all, must, in all of its conditions, be very close to the conditions of the present life? Death, if it leads to immortality, can "make no sudden break in our spiritual life," but must mark nothing more decisive than the end of one stage of spiritual development and the

beginning of another. The future life, that is, must begin for each one of us exactly where our present life leaves off. We may find the conditions in the next world more favourable to moral and spiritual attainment than they are in this life—we may find that, in our spiritual bodies, we are equipped with powers of aspiration and achievement greater than any that we have ever known before—we may find that everything has widened to boundaries of which we have never even dreamed, just as the landscape widens before our gaze as we climb higher and higher upon the mountain-side. But the essential thing in both realms of existence must be the same—namely, the chance for labour, growth, and achievement. There will be nothing in the future life that is a perfect whole. There will be no boundaries beyond which the human soul can not venture upon its voyages of discovery. There will still be goals to seek and horizons to explore. There will still be struggle and disappointment and failure—there will still be hope and courage and aspiration. Victories will be won there beyond all that we had ever dreamed of here—summits will there be gained to which here we never dared to climb. But still, forever and forever, there will be the chance to improve things by our own efforts; still the chance to do better and to be more—for the spiritual universe, like the material universe, is a realm which knows not boundaries but frontiers. To be immortal, is to have the opportunity to do one more thing, and to take one more step. It is

to have the privilege of finding one more truth and winning one more victory for God. It is to grow—to climb—to explore—in the words of the Elizabethan poet, George Chapman, it is “to die aspiring.”

V

This, now, being our conception of immortality, who is there will say that such an immortality is not desirable? Who would not prefer this life of new endeavour to absolute extinction? Even Ostwald, who we saw could look into his own heart and find no regret connected with the idea of death, even when conceived of as total oblivion, confessed, at an unguarded moment, in the passage quoted above, that “there are still many things which I should like to do or to experience before I die.” And what does this confession mean if not that he would like to live on after death, if in this future life he could do the things which he had left undone here and experience the things which here he was not able to experience? Who is there who does not find within himself this same yearning to do things which we know we shall never have time to do within the space of a single lifetime, and to experience things which here lie quite beyond the range of our experience? “There is no one of us, even the most fortunate,” says Mr. Dickinson, with perfect truth, “who ever achieves the good of which he feels himself capable and in which

alone he can rest." We are always struggling to climb higher—always striving to move beyond the horizons which wrap us round.

Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
Still cheating the inviolable shade.

Is immortality, you ask, desirable?—the immortality which means not fulfilment but further realization, not the goal attained but further progress toward the goal? Why should not the strong, healthy, normal man desire this immortality even as he desires the dawning of another day upon the earth? I see my little son, for example, playing in his nursery with his toys. All day long he has played, building his houses and railroads and steamships—and then, as the shadows of the evening steal across the sky, the little legs begin to drag and the little eyes to droop, and the moment comes for bed! Slowly, reluctantly, he kisses each pretty toy good-night, and bids them to stay just where they are, till he comes to them again in the morning; and soon the little head sinks down upon the pillow, to wait for the coming of another day when he can resume his interrupted play. And so with the normal man! He toils through the hours of the day at his appointed task. He is an artisan at the bench—a painter at the easel—a musician at the piano—a teacher at the desk—a lawyer in the court. And lo, with the coming of the night, the labour is put aside,

that the weary head and tired brain may rest. But it is always with reluctance, and always with anticipation of the new day when the task, which means so much, can be resumed. We all desire another day to follow upon the night—and why should we not equally desire another life beyond the grave? To live on and on and still again to live, with time to do all that we want to do, to experience all that we yearn to experience, to move from life to life through the eternity of God, as the little child moves from day to day in the span of mortal years—to achieve a little more goodness, gaze upon a little more beauty—to scale one more peak and look in rapture upon the higher peak beyond, to cross one more sea and look upon the broader sea that still stretches to the dim horizon,—this is the aspiration of every worthy soul. We desire immortality even as Tennyson's Ulysses, in his old age, with his wars upon the plains of Troy finished and his voyage across the stormy seas to Ithaca at an end, still yearned to launch once more upon the waters and sail again to undiscovered lands. He thinks of all that he has experienced in the mighty years gone by—and yet, he says, what is experience, but

. . . an arch where thro'
 Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
 Forever and forever when I move.
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
 As though to breathe were life. Life piled on life
 Were all too little.

And then he rouses himself, calls his toil-worn mariners about him, and resolves to sail upon another quest:

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark broad seas . . . Come, my
friends,
'T is not too late to seek another world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die,
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

And so with every man, who, like Ulysses, would "drink life to the lees." Immortality is desirable—desirable as the dawning of another day of labour and of love—desirable as another voyage to Ulysses. Who would not desire immortality when it is interpreted in this way, which is the only reasonable way? We have seen that most men are indifferent to the whole question, and prefer not to think about it at all. But why, if not because the majority of men are little better than animals, who eat and sleep and live only from moment to moment, and never rise to those realms of spiritual idealism:

To follow knowledge like a sinking star
Beyond the utmost bounds of human thought.

We have seen also that there are many men who are pessimists, and who regard all life as essentially

bad, and therefore shrink from immortality as the continuance of evil. But now we see that while life may be as bad as these pessimists would describe it, it is at heart characterized by the saving grace of being improvable by our efforts. The bad can be made a little better through human devotion and sacrifice. And this being the case, what pessimist, who really hated the evil which he deplored, would not desire to live as long as possible after death, in order that, by his efforts, this wretched human existence of ours might be improved as much as possible? And then there are the scientists like Ostwald, the philosophers like Shaw, the poets like Landor, who have lived the fullest kind of life, and view the extinction of death with complacency. But why, if not that they think of immortality as a condition of idleness and unending peace, with no new truths to discover and no new visions of beauty to unveil. Even Ostwald, as we have seen, confessed that the thought of death was a bit unpleasant, since he knew that he would have to leave many things undone and many experiences untried. Suppose, now, that Ostwald could but think of the future life as another life like this, where, as here, he could "strive and seek, find and never yield"—and would he not desire immortality even as Ulysses desired to launch his ship? And as for those persons who deplore immortality because it tends to distract the attention of men from the problems of this present life, are they not answered

by the recollection that, if immortality is what we have described it to be, then the best preparation for the next life is to live this life for all that it is worth? We do not idle away the hours of today because we hope to be alive tomorrow. Rather do we toil the harder at our present task, that

. . . each tomorrow
Find us farther than today.

VI

The conclusion of this whole matter may be summed up, perhaps, in the statement that the immortal life is desirable in the same way and to the same extent that present life is desirable. The only persons who can be at all justified in longing for extinction are the pessimists, whose judgment it is that existence here is too wretched an affair to be endured, much less prolonged. Obsessed with the monotony of life, its dull routine, its work that comes to nothing, its promises that mock, its hopes that deceive, they would gladly be released not merely tomorrow, but today! Not the future life in particular, but life in general, they would escape! With a magnificent consistency, they denounce all existence whatsoever in one sweeping indictment of despair, and thus turn away from the unwelcome future, only as they turn away from the good-ridded past and the hated present.

From such a viewpoint, there is perhaps some

justification for the plea, that immortality is not desirable. But what shall we say as to this viewpoint? Is not life, to most of us, abundantly worth while? Is not the world full of beauty, and existence of delight? Does not pain have its balms, failure its rewards, sorrow its consolations? Can any burden rob us of the joys of sympathy and affection? Can any suffering spoil the privilege of service? Who that is wise would surrender the past with its precious memories, the present with its rich experiences, the future with its undiscovered possibilities? Who that is sane would barter one blissful moment of love, of prayer, of fleeting dreams, for years of pain and loss? Must we not all, in our best moments at least, join the hymnist in her psalm of gratitude:

O God, I thank thee for each sight
 Of beauty that thy hand doth give,
 For sunny skies and air and light,—
 O God, I thank thee that I live.

Here is the true attitude toward the problem of human living! And it is an attitude which justifies at once the present and the future. If any life is good, all life is good. If existence is welcome for one single instant, it is welcome forever. Robert Browning characteristically expresses this conquest of pessimism by optimism, and this faith in the desirability of immortality which is found in the basic faith in life, in his great *Epilogue*:

At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
 When you set your fancies free,
 Will they pass to where—by death, fools think, im-
 prisoned—
 Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved
 so,

 Pity me?

Oh, to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!
 What had I on earth to do
 With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?
 Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivell
 —Being—who?

One who never turned his back but marched breast
 forward,
 Never doubted clouds would break,
 Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong
 would triumph,
 Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
 Sleep to wake.

No, at noon-day in the bustle of man's work-time,
 Greet the unseen with a cheer!
 Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
 "Strive and thrive!" cry "speed,—fight on, fare ever,
 There as here!"

CHAPTER X

MORTAL OR IMMORTAL: DOES IT MAKE ANY PRACTICAL DIFFERENCE?

"The immortality of the soul is a thing that concerns us so closely and touches us so profoundly, that we must have lost all feeling to be indifferent as to knowing how the matter is. All our actions and all our thoughts must follow such different paths, according as there are eternal goods to hope for or are not, that it is impossible to take a step without regulating it in view of this point."—Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, vol. ii., Art. 2.

I

ONE last question still remains to be answered, before our discussion of immortality can be regarded as in any sense complete. I refer to the inquiry as to what difference it makes, from the standpoint of practical activity, whether we are beings who are immortal or not. Will the decision of this question tend to alter in any degree the daily procedure of our lives—the work we have to do, the ideals we ought to cherish, the relations which we must have with our fellow-men? Are we discussing a practical problem, of concern to everybody, or a purely academic

question, which can be of real interest to nobody but the speculative theologian and philosopher?

This question has been asked with more or less frequency in all ages; but it has become especially prominent in our time, which is in nothing more distinctive than in its insistence upon applying to every theoretical proposition the pragmatic test. What difference does it make, these practical-minded people ask, whether we are to perish at the moment of death, like a snuffed-out candle, or are to continue to live forever in some future state of existence, the exact character of which is utterly inconceivable? Suppose that it were proved tomorrow that beyond this life there was nothing but extinction for the human soul—or suppose, on the other hand, that it were similarly proved that this earthly career was only the beginning of an existence that was eternal—what actual difference would be made by this demonstration, either one way or the other, in the routine processes of our daily lives? We have certain duties to perform, certain responsibilities to discharge, certain work to do. In meeting these tasks of the day, do we ever ask ourselves whether we are performing them as mortals or immortals? Do we ever think of the possibility of a future life at all, as we map out our careers, choose our fields of activity, and determine our goals of achievement? Do we not find, as a matter of fact, that most of the things which engage our attention are things of

time and not of eternity, and that we are rightly concerned therefore with today and not with tomorrow? Was not Henry David Thoreau a wise man when, in his last hours, he was asked by his friend, Parker Pillsbury, who sat by his bedside, whether he could see anything on the other side, and replied, "One world at a time, Parker—one world at a time"?

II

Any reasonable answer to this inquiry must make it perfectly plain, at the very outset, that, in many important respects, this question of the life beyond the grave makes no essential difference whatsoever. It has always been the tendency, as we very well know, to emphasize the vital consequences of this faith in immortality, and to declare that, if it were ever made certain that death was the end of all, the lives of men would be different from what they are at the present moment. But I for one must confess that I am utterly unable to see wherein there would be any possibility, in certain directions at least, of these momentous changes taking place. Mortal or immortal, in most respects we would be identically the same individuals. From the practical point of view, in other words, the question of immortality is, for the most part, of very little importance.

It has been argued for unnumbered centuries, for example, that, if men were ever convinced that there was no future existence, they would forthwith

proceed to abandon all those moral principles and spiritual ideals which make life sweet and clean and beautiful, and give themselves over to "riotous living," as did the Prodigal Son in the parable. If this life were all, then men would strive to get as much out of this world as they could in terms of food and drink and money; and life would become not a school for the disciplining of the soul, but one great orgy for the satisfaction of the flesh. Men would no longer love one another, live for one another, die for one another. They would no longer serve great causes, enlist in perilous crusades, fight hopeless battles for high ideals. They would simply be so many pigs pushing and thrusting for the chance to get their snouts as deep into the trough as possible. If we know that we are immortal, then we have every reason to be "spiritually minded, which is life and peace"; but if we know that we are mortal, then we will forthwith become "carnally minded, which is death." This is the logic of St. Paul, when he said, in reference to the resurrection of the dead, "If the dead rise not, let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die." And similarly is this the logic of the Persian poet, throughout the *Rubaiyat*, in the face not of the certainty of mortality but merely of the uncertainty of immortality, as, for instance, where he says,

Yesterday this day's Madness did prepare;
Tomorrow's Silence, Triumph, or Despair:

Drink! for you know not whence you came, nor why;
 Drink! for you know not why you go, nor where.

Now this may seem, at first glance, to be very good logic. But if we will consider the question with some care for a moment, and ask just what is the essential connection between eating and drinking today, and dying tomorrow, we will find that this logic of the apostle and of the poet is not so sound as we had at first imagined. On the contrary, wherein is there any logic in their argument whatsoever? Do you really mean to say that men are brave and women pure—that causes are espoused, ideals cherished, and sacrifices offered—that “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,” which St. Paul enumerates as the “fruits of the spirit,” are commonplaces of existence—only because of our faith in the immortality of the soul? Do you mean to say that, if somebody should actually discover tomorrow that there is nothing beyond the shadow of the grave, humanity would immediately throw over all the hopes and dreams of the ages, and adopt what Professor Carver, of Harvard, calls, in his *The Religion Worth Having*, a “pig-trough” philosophy of life? Do you think, for a moment, that, if Jesus or Socrates or Augustine or Savonarola or Martin Luther, or any of the other supreme heroes of the world’s history, had become convinced that this life is all, they would at once have abandoned the ideals which they

were cherishing and the work which they were doing, and surrendered themselves to the swinish task of eating, drinking, and making merry?

Even as a speculation, this conclusion is absurd. But fortunately, in this case, we do not have to rely upon speculation. As a matter of fact, men have believed in the past that they were only mortal, and still they have held as fast as ever to the spiritual verities of the soul. It is an interesting circumstance, for example, that, in the prophetic period of Israelitish history, when moral idealism reached what still remains, in many ways, the high-water mark of human achievement, there was no belief in an immortal life, at least as we hold the conception of the future at the present day. The Hebrews believed, of course, as we have seen, that there was an existence beyond the grave; but it was a shadowy kind of life—cold, dreary, and uninviting—and it played no part in their philosophy of ethics and religion. And yet it was this same age which produced those prophets of the soul, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, whose glowing words still mark the crowning expression of spiritual truth. The same thing is true of the Stoics of Greece and Rome. Some of these great teachers believed in immortality, and some did not. But the important thing to notice is, that doctrine had no place in their system of moral idealism. "The highest good according to Stoicism," says Professor Weber in his *History of Philosophy*, "is to practise virtue for its own

sake, to do your duty because it is your duty," regardless of whether you are to live or to die, when this world has been left behind.¹ And then, too, think of the individual men, who have lived, at various times and places, with souls devoid of all belief in an immortal life—calm, strong, determined, sad-hearted men,—and still have passed their days upon the earth in loyalty and love, and then have laid them down in their graves without the slightest hope of an awakening from what they have regarded as the last, long sleep. If the logic of St. Paul is sound, then these men would have been roués and debauchees—they would have taken the cash and let the credit go—they would have desired at the most

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread . . ."

But as it is, these men have been among the purest and noblest of mankind—patient seekers after truth, stalwart soldiers of the common good, willing martyrs to the cruelty and lust of church and state. Think, for example, of Thomas Huxley, one of the sweetest, truest, and bravest of men. He was self-controlled, self-sacrificing, unselfish, a loving husband and devoted father, a faithful friend, a lover of truth, honour, and righteousness, a hater of falsehood, dishonour, and iniquity, a man who gladly put by the wealth of the world

¹ See *History of Philosophy*, page 145.

and the praise of men for the sake of obeying the dictates of his conscience. And yet never for one moment did the thought of immortality intrude upon his life. Even when he stood by the grave of his oldest child, Noel, overwhelmed with grief, and his friend, Charles Kingsley, besought him to find comfort in the immortal hope, the heroic man replied,—“I have searched over the ground of my belief, and if wife and child and name and fame were all to be lost to me one after the other as the penalty, still I would not lie.”¹

The logic of St. Paul and of Omar, therefore, does not hold. It makes no practical difference, from the standpoint of the moral life, whether we are mortal or immortal. Men are good or they are bad, for reasons which are remote from considerations as to a future life. Prove that there is a future life, and we will make little or no difference in the character of the man who is now living in the belief that this life is all. Prove that there is not a future life, and we will also make little or no difference in the character of the man who is now cherishing the unconquerable hope of an eternal existence. “Beauty is its own excuse for being,” says Emerson; and the same thing is true of goodness. Goodness is dependent not upon any external faith in immortality or in anything else. Goodness stands unsupported upon its own feet. It makes no excuses and asks

¹ See the *Life of Thomas Huxley*, by Leonard Huxley, volume i., pages 233-238.

no reasons for itself. Whether we are mortal or immortal, whether we live or die, right is still right, and wrong is still wrong; and we shall still understand that we must do the right and avoid the wrong, though the heavens fall. We shall be like the heroic mariner, of whom Seneca tells us in his parable, who, when wrestling in his vessel with the storm, cried out, "O Neptune, thou canst save me if thou wilt, or thou canst drown me. But whether or no, I will hold my rudder true!" Those men who have lived virtuously, without any hope of immortality, if they have thought about the matter at all, have adopted the logic not of St. Paul, but of Matthew Arnold, in his sonnet entitled, *The Better Part*:

"We live no more, when we have done our span?"

"Well, then, for Christ," thou answerest, "who can care?

From sin, which Heaven records not, why forbear?
Live we like brutes, our life without a plan!"

So answerest thou; but why not rather say,

"Hath man no second life? Pitch this one high!"

Again it has been argued, along very much the same lines as those which we have just indicated, that, if it were ever proved that there was no such thing as an eternal life, men would at once give up all forms of useful activity, and surrender themselves to idleness, luxury, and pleasure. They might not be sinful or corrupt, but they certainly

would not work; or they would work only enough to keep body and soul together, during their allotted span of years, in some degree of comfort and repose, and to attain to that measure of happiness which can only come from some kind of occupation. One thing is sure—namely, that men would abandon at once all those eternal quests which now constitute the mystery and the glory of existence. Knowing that they had but a comparatively few years to live, at the very most, men would not bother to acquire knowledge or endeavour to win the goal of truth. Knowing that, in a generation or two, it would all be over, men would not paint pictures, or carve statues, or compose music, in a vain attempt to sound the depths and scale the heights of beauty. Knowing that this short life was all, and that this earth was destined ultimately to be destroyed, men would not think it worth while to seek ideals of goodness, and try to realize and perpetuate those ideals in the form of social institutions. The work of life would not be as it is now, the quest of distant goals and the fight for forlorn hopes. It would become at best a mere matter of routine—a search not for truth or beauty or goodness, but for a fair amount of decent comfort in the few troubled years of our earthly pilgrimage. As one writer puts it, in this connection,

If I know that after I have lived ten years here, that is the end of me, one kind of life would be appro-

priate for me. But if I know that, at the end of ten or twenty years, I am suddenly transferred to some other kind of life, and that this life is to continue indefinitely, then the whole problem is changed."¹

Now here again is a piece of logic which seems at first sight to be plausible enough, but which in reality is absolutely unsound. Take our own lives right here upon this earth at the present! Suppose we were told tomorrow, by somebody who could see into the future, that we were going to die not at the end of forty years or fifty years from today but at the end of only five years. Would this discovery, make any change in the character of our lives? Would we stop reading books or looking at pictures or listening to music, because in the brief space of five years we could learn little more about these things than we know and appreciate at the present time? Would we abandon our labours at our respective tasks, because we could hope to accomplish very little, in that period of time, which would be of permanent service to the world or to our particular business or profession? Would we work just long enough to accumulate enough money to keep us going, so to speak, for another five years, and then, when the last necessary penny was in hand, give the rest of our days to idleness and pleasure? It may be that, if we knew that we were not going to live, we would do some one or all of these foolish things. But if

¹ See M. J. Savage, *Life Beyond Death*, page 3.

we are the men that we ought to be, I believe that we would keep right on with our present work from day to day, without any thought whatsoever for the future, whether it was to be five, ten, or fifty years. What difference does it make if we only have this one life to live? We are still interested in truth, and we propose to find all the truth that we can in so short a space of time. We still love the beautiful, and we are going to see all the beauty that may be visible to mortal eyes. We still believe in goodness, and we are going to bring all the goodness into our life and into the lives of other men that we can reach in a half century or so. So at least it has always been with those men who have allowed themselves to cherish no expectations of a future life. Wilhelm Ostwald, for instance, as we saw in the last chapter, tells us frankly that he does not believe in a life beyond the grave, and, what is more, that he has no desire for such a life. But does this opinion induce him to abandon his chemical experiments, desert his investigations, and idle away his days? On the contrary! In order that things undone and unexperienced may be as few as possible at the moment of his death, he proceeds to live one of the busiest lives that the world of scientific endeavour has ever seen!

Here are at least two directions in which the doctrine of immortality makes little or no practical difference in our lives. But now we come to a matter in which it would seem that this doctrine

makes all the difference in the world. I refer to the great realm of personal relationships, which comprises the largest and surely the most precious part of human living. From the very start, these lives of ours are dependent, in some way or other, upon the lives of other people. The baby clings with unknowing hands to its mother's breast, and rejoices in the strong arms of its father. A little later the child binds up its life with the lives of its brothers and sisters; and then, one by one, finds friends and comrades in the schoolroom or on the playground. With the coming of adolescence and the first entrance into the period of maturity, there come those associations which endure; and then, if God is good, there come marriage and parenthood. Always, from the cradle to the grave, there are these lives to which our lives are bound—these friends and kinsmen to whom we cling—these dear ones in whom we live and move and have our being, and without whom it would seem scarcely worth while to keep on living. And always, sooner or later, to one and all of us, without prejudice or favour, there comes the loss of some of those we love; and sometimes, alas! be it said, the loss of all. And we stand stricken, helpless—our light turned into darkness, our joy transfigured into sorrow. And the only thing that seems to save us is the thought that somewhere and sometime we shall meet again all those whom we have loved and lost. In the darkness of agony that sweeps down upon us, we feel that we should

perish utterly, were it not for the "kindly light" which leads us on

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
 The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which (we) have loved long since, and lost awhile.

"Lost awhile," says the hymn writer! But suppose that they were "lost forever!" Would this make no practical difference to us here in this world? On the contrary, would it not make so great a difference that we would curse this life as an unmitigated evil, regret that we had ever been born into the world, and accept with all its horrors the awful philosophy of pessimism?

Here certainly would seem to be a place where the answer to the question of "mortal or immortal?" makes a stupendous difference to us in our problem of living. And yet, even here, I demur to such a conclusion. If we are never to see again, in some other life, those whom we have loved and lost in this present life, I am quite ready to confess that this life at once becomes a more solemn experience than we have ever been willing to admit. But I would deny that the loss of the immortal life and with it our expectation of meeting our loved ones should make us pessimists in our attitude toward the world. This tragedy of permanent separation, awful as it is, would still fall far short of outweighing the abundant good with which life is still filled to the brim. This one

thing, if it were proved to be true, could not blot out the sun, hide the stars, destroy the beauty of the summer, banish the mystery of the sea, kill the joy of our love for those still living in the world, or the happiness of serving those who are suffering even as are we. Above all, our loss, however grievous and permanent, could not deprive us of all that we had had before the angel of death folded her wings above our hearts. Would we not be able to say here exactly what Plutarch wrote to his wife when the word was brought to him that their little daughter was dead.

Let us call to mind [he said], the years before our little child was born. We are now in the same condition as then, except that the time she was with us is to be counted as an added blessing. Let us not ungratefully accuse Fortune of what was given us, because we could not also have all that we desired. What we had, and while we had it, was good, though now we have it no longer. . . . Remember also how much of good you still possess. Because one page of your book is blotted, do not forget all the other leaves whose reading is fair and whose pictures are beautiful. We should not be like misers, who never enjoy what they have, but only bewail what they lose.¹

Even here, therefore, in this realm of friendship, comradeship, love—the question of “mortal or immortal?” does not make so much difference as we are prone to imagine. Granted that there is no immortal life—granted that those whom we have

¹ Quoted in Savage's *Minister's Handbook*, page 37.

loved and lost we shall never meet again—still we may, nay must, believe that God is good, that the world is fair, and that life is worth the living. The writings of Dr. Robert Collyer, the eminent Unitarian divine, are a rich treasury of beautiful and inspiring thoughts; but nowhere, in all his books, can a fairer jewel be found than this:

If the Higher Powers should say to me, "We have nothing else for you here or hereafter," I think I should answer: "I make no claim. I would love to see those I have lost once more; but if it is not to be so, I am still debtor for the untold blessings of my many years."

In all these matters, therefore, we must affirm that the doctrine of immortality makes little—or should make little—practical difference in our daily lives. Mortal or immortal, we must still live the life of the spirit; still seek unremittingly the true, the beautiful, and the good; still "make no claim," but only be "debtor for the untold blessings of (our) many years." Whatever the future has in store, still does it remain true that "To them that love God, all things work together for good."

III

But is this the final conclusion to which we must come? Must we conclude that it makes no difference, in any practical way, whether we believe in the future life or not? Must we agree that the

doctrine of immortality is nothing but a purely theoretical proposition, of interest to the philosopher, like the problem of the fourth dimension, but of no essential interest to the man of practical affairs, whose task it is not to juggle with speculations, but to find, as best he can, the way of life?

So it would seem, at this point! But this point, as it so happens, is not the end. Another point lies ahead, and if we can but reach this point, our whole problem will be transformed.

We can best get at this farther point by throwing our minds back over all the road which we have been travelling, and asking the simple question as to what is the exact difference in our minds between the conception of a mortal life and the conception of an immortal life? If we refer to the theological teachings of the church, we shall find, as we have seen in much detail, that this difference is very great—so great, indeed, that the future life has usually been described as everything that the present life is not. This narrow and wholly fantastic conception of immortality, however, we have altogether cast aside in favour of that broad philosophical conception of the eternal life as all of a single piece. We have laid down the proposition that the eternal life is just as much present with us here as it will ever be present over there—that if we are ever to be immortal we are immortal now—and that the future life, therefore, is nothing but a continuation, on a little higher plane, perhaps, of the existence which we are

enjoying at the present moment. To be immortal means nothing more nor less than to continue to live after we have apparently died.

From such a point of view as this, it is evident, is it not, that the only difference between the conception of a mortal life and the conception of an immortal life is the difference between a limited and an unlimited existence? To believe that we are immortal is not to believe that we are to enter into another and an eternal life—that we are to go to a realm wholly different in character from this present earth and to stay there forever. On the contrary, it is simply to believe that this present life goes on—that what seems to be finite is really infinite, and that what seems to be transient is in reality eternal. Mortality means the definite and final fixing of limitations of time, place, growth, achievement, service; immortality means the immediate and absolute removal of these limitations. Here and here alone, in the matter of extension and not of character, is the only essential difference which can be detected between these two conceptions of human life.

Just here, also, in this matter of the removal of limitations, do we find the practical as well as the theoretical difference between these two ideas. Mortal or Immortal: Does It Make Any Practical Difference? you ask. And I answer, Yes! it makes all the practical difference in the world. And this from at least two points of view—the individual, and the social!

IV

If we turn first to the consideration of the individual, we shall find, I believe, that the difference between the mortal and the immortal conception of life lies in the fact that, if we are mortal we are limited beings grappling with tasks that are unlimited; while if we are immortal, we are beings endowed with unlimited powers, which are commensurate, therefore, with our unlimited responsibilities.

What is more evident than the fact that, in every realm of experience, we are confronted by problems that are infinite and eternal—that is to say, unlimited—in their character? In the realm of morals, we are confronted by the problem of realizing within our souls the pure and perfect life of the spirit; and it is of the very essence of the good life, that it no sooner reaches to one level of achievement than it discovers some other and higher goal far on ahead. If a man becomes satisfied that he has attained to moral and spiritual perfection, then at that moment does he become immoral, and unveil his essential imperfection. The moral life, in other words, is not an achievement but a quest. The truly virtuous man is he who can say, with St. Paul, I am not one who has “already attained,” neither is “already perfect; but I follow after, . . . pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God.”

The same thing is true in the world of action. What is more evident in our pursuit of truth than the fact that truth can never be fully revealed to the inquiring mind? What is more evident in our search for beauty than that beauty is an elusive creature who can never be captured and held in earthly bonds? What is more evident in our struggle for social justice, righteousness, and peace, than the simple fact that, as William Morris put it, there must always be something that is "better than well"?

And do we not meet with the same experience in the field of personal relationship? Is it not true that, no matter how deeply and sincerely we may love, we never find it possible to give expression to the emotion which has possession of our souls? In other words, we are limited beings, confronted by tasks that are unlimited.

Suppose, now, that we are suddenly told that we are indeed limited beings, in that we shall perish utterly after a few short years upon this swinging earth! Will this discovery of our limitations in time and place and power make no practical difference to us in our daily living? It would not persuade us to abandon ourselves forthwith to corruption, idleness, or pessimism. We would still strive to pitch this one life high, to gain as much truth, beauty, and goodness as possible in our few years, to recognize and give thanks for the abounding joy of mortality. But on the other hand, would not all zest, thrill, and

ambition speedily depart? Would not a kind of fatalistic disheartenment settle down like a fog upon our souls? We would still work, struggle, achieve, as we are men, but it would be not as conquerors but as slaves. And as we ended our few brief days of existence, we would be filled with sorrow that there was so much to do, and we had no more time or strength at our disposal. The thought comes again to mind of Wilhelm Ostwald, who, confessing that he has no hope of immortality, confesses also that he will regret, at the moment of death, that "there are still many things which I should like to do or to experience before I die."

But suppose that we actually know, as we now believe, that we are immortal! This will mean, as we have seen, that all our limitations are removed—that time, strength, opportunities are enlarged to the infinite measure of the tasks which we are set here to perform. What a difference this will make to us in outlook and in spirit! With what exultation will we give ourselves to the pursuit of the highest ideals of the soul—with what joy will we seek for truth, goodness, and beauty—with what comfort will we surrender ourselves to love! What care we if the goal of moral achievement is always far ahead in the distance?—the eternal years of God are ours to seek and find that goal! What care we if truth, beauty, and goodness seem unattainable in this present life?—this life is only the beginning of our existence, and what we cannot find and understand here, we shall

some day find and understand over there. What care we, if we cannot express at this present moment the full measure of our affection for those we love?—we can go on loving, aeon after aeon through all the centuries of our immortal life, and some time the greatness of our love will be made manifest! “Mortal or immortal,” make any difference? Think of the difference it makes to the old man who comes to his grave with the consciousness that there are still many things which he would like to do or to experience before he dies. He will feel none of the regrets experienced by Ostwald; on the contrary, he will be of good cheer, in the consciousness that he has only begun to live, and that he has plenty of time still to do and experience all. Think of the difference it makes to the young man who is stricken by accident or disease and dies before his time, with words unspoken, work undone, hopes unfulfilled. He will not complain and curse, as he well might do, if this life were all; on the contrary, he will be content to die, in the consciousness that he can begin again over there just where he has left off here. And think of the difference it makes to the man who has tried and failed—who has fought and been beaten. He will not perish in the blackness of despair, that in the one life which was his, he has accomplished nothing; on the contrary, he will rejoice in the consciousness that his life is but a single day, and that days unnumbered lie ahead, when he may struggle and at last “make

good." Like the man who leaves his unfinished work at night, and lies down upon his bed happy and content since he knows that another day will dawn for the completion of his task, so may we, as immortal beings, meet death unafraid, whether it come early or come late, knowing that another day will come, and life go on forever.

V

Much the same must be said of the practical consequences of the immortal hope when viewed from the social point of view. For many generations, of course, as we know all too well, the practical outcome of the belief in immortality was a paralysis of social interest and social effort. So occupied were men with the contemplation of the life to come that they had no eyes for the problems of the life that now is. So eager were they to prepare for entrance into the world beyond the grave, that they fled from the daily tasks of this world altogether and immersed themselves in hermit cave or monastery cell. Or, if men were moved to the service of their fellow-beings, they became so obsessed with the idea of saving them from the anticipated horrors of hell, that they had no thought of saving them from the ever-present horrors of the earthly hell of poverty, disease, ignorance, and general wretchedness. The practical consequences of the immortal hope seem here to have been not so much negligible as actively

disastrous. Social problems were left unsolved, social miseries unbanished, social wrongs unassailed, simply and solely because the absorbing thought of the life eternal set soul against body, heaven against earth, the mansions in the holy city of God against the tenements and slums in the unholy cities of mankind!

Now much of our present indifference, or even hostility, to the doctrine of immortality represents, as we have already seen, a genuine and praiseworthy reaction against this inverted viewpoint. The modern passion for social service, in sweeping us back into the currents of daily life, has at the same time swept us away from the barren shores of "other-worldliness." We are interested primarily today in this world and not in the world to come. We feel that we can afford to forget for a time the possibilities and probabilities of tomorrow, if we can thereby remember a little more nearly the certainties of today. Our business is not to prepare for another life, but to utilize this life—not to wait idly for the coming of the night, but to work lest the night come when no man can work—not to anticipate a kingdom of heaven out there beyond the grave, but to bring in a kingdom of heaven right here upon the earth where now we stand. Let us wipe out misery, heal disease, abolish poverty, destroy injustice, emancipate bondmen, establish truth, freedom, love among men—and then, hap what hap, we shall have done our duty, and made our

contribution to the common good. Away with the thought of immortality—away with this hope of a future world! Live for today rather than for tomorrow—live here, rather than over there—do the nearest task, rather than dream the farthest dream. “Our grand business,” said Thomas Carlyle, “undoubtedly is, not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies closely at hand.”¹

All this, of course, represents an almost inconceivable gain. But one great question still remains unanswered. What is the reason for our service? What do we hope to gain by struggling to clean up the muck and mire of the world? Why not leave things as they are, instead of trying, at great cost, to rebuild the fabric of civilization?

It is just here, in this matter of the motive which is behind and the goal which is ahead of the social service of our time, that we find the great difference which is introduced into our lives by the conception of immortality. If men are mortal, then it is certain that we are impelled to the work of social betterment and reform by no deeper feeling or loftier motive, than that of common, everyday pity. We seek to abolish poverty, wipe out slums, alleviate inhuman conditions of toil, emancipate child-labourers, heal the sick, compensate the injured, protect the aged, only as we seek to revive a wounded bird, or rescue a tortured horse from an inhuman master—because

¹ See *Essays*: “Signs of the Times.”

the sight of suffering offends our delicate sensibilities and moves us to compassion. We cannot bear that any living thing should be made to endure unnecessary pain. We are unwilling that any creature should be denied the ordinary comforts of life and be so maltreated as to be driven to an untimely and wretched death. Men, as well as animals, must be adequately fed, decently housed, humanely treated. Therefore do we establish our reform organizations, as we establish our society for the prevention of cruelty to animals, and give ourselves to the task of abolishing the social disabilities and cruelties under which the majority of men and women live and labour, that "even the least of these, our brethren," in the human as well as in the animal realm, may be rescued from the "fell clutch of circumstance."

Now this point of view, of course, is all right as far as it goes. But how far, pray, does it go? Are we doing anything more after all, than putting man on a common level with the animals—or seeking any nobler aim than that of providing for every human creature that moderate degree of outward comfort and inward content which is the proud possession of the hog who has a full belly and a clean bed of straw in a sunny corner of his pen? Are we taking any higher view of life than that accepted by the savage who has fulfilled his last ambition, when he has captured his woman, scalped his foe, hung his tepee with good meat, and filled his pipe with good tobacco! Where,

in this view of social service, are found the spiritual values which are usually associated with humanity? What place, in this reading of the problem of life and destiny, can be found for the familiar maxim that "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God?" If this be all, what justification is there for those dreams and visions of the soul for which, again and again, the truest men and bravest women have gladly sacrificed every bodily comfort, every physical satisfaction, and oftentimes life itself?

We have only to ask such questions as these to find ourselves face to face at once with the immortal hope as the *sine qua non* of this very work of social service and social reform, of which we are now speaking. If this noble passion for a better world, which is the dominant and noblest feature of our age, is to achieve the results it can achieve and bring to mankind the emancipation which it long has promised, it must do this under the impetus of the great faith in an eternal life! The social changes proposed in our time are only seen in their real significance when they are recognized as the means of bringing men into their spiritual, and not merely their material, inheritance. Adequate food, decent housing, warm clothing, clean streets, fresh air, sunlight, living wages, leisure, recreation, etc., are all essential, as we know. But the important aspect of these material conditions only becomes apparent when it is seen that

these things must be secured for men not merely in order that an animal shall not suffer, but chiefly in order that an immortal soul shall not perish! It is here that the matter of limits appears again! The tragedy of poverty and all its attendant miseries is not to be found in starved, frozen, and broken bodies, but in starved ideals, frozen affections, and broken spirits. That the poor man should suffer physically is bad, of course, but it is infinitely worse that he should suffer morally and spiritually. And it is the crowning crime of poverty that it forces upon its helpless victims a moral and spiritual degradation which parallels in every sense the physical. Man is much more than a body—more than mouth and throat and stomach. Primarily he is an immortal soul. In this world, however, body and soul go hand in hand together. Therefore, when an unjust world forces upon man the curse of economic misery, he is robbed not only of all that should be his, but robbed as well of *all that he should be!*

It is this idea, which springs solely from the conception of man as an immortal being, which puts behind the work of social service an unconquerable impulse, and puts before it a not unworthy goal. If death ends all, why then we shall be well content if each gets his bite and has his place to wallow. But if life is in truth eternal, then shall we not be content until every man, "from the least even unto the greatest," has been

lifted up out of the dens of earth onto the heights of the spirit, and has fulfilled the prophet's vision of knowing God. If we wish great results, we must command great motives. If we want to reach great heights, we must "hitch our wagon to a star." There is no motive of social service which is comparable to the faith which believes in the eternal destiny of man. There is no goal of social service which begins to loom as high as that complete emancipation here and now of an immortal soul. "Thy Kingdom come," is our one great prayer to God these days. That Kingdom shall come, and only come, when, as we gaze into the pinched face of the child labourer, or look upon the withered form of the slum-dweller, or watch the despair of the unemployed, we see not merely the suffering of a mortal body, but the present damnation of an eternal spirit!

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

“I’m always speculating about why I always take the Life after Death for granted, while so many people start with extinction, and throw the *onus probandi* of a hereafter on the Immortalist. I always catch myself seeking for a proof of extinction, and finding none. I used to think once that it was only resentment against the attitude of those who see a proof of cessation of existence in the disappearance of the means by which they have detected it in others. I mean the existence of other Egos than their own. For I never have seen, and never shall see, that the cessation of the evidence of existence is necessarily evidence of the cessation of existence. I’m very wordy, but it’s difficult!”—William De Morgan, in *Joseph Vance*, page 371.

I

IT has again and again been remarked that it is an extraordinary thing that man should ever have conceived of such an idea as that of the immortality of the soul. But have we ever stopped to realize how extraordinary this fact really is?—that it is so extraordinary, indeed as to constitute, like every other superstition, its own best refutation? Look at the situation just as it is!

Here at one moment we see a person, whom we know and love, "alive" as we say. If asked to state what we mean by "alive," we refer first of all to the elemental fact which characterizes all living creatures—namely, response to external stimuli or impressions. This person shivers when it is cold, seeks the shadow when it is warm, leaps away from sudden peril, cries out when hurt, flees or defends himself when assailed by an enemy. "If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die?"

In the case of a human being, however, there are those higher evidences of life which are to be found in the various actions which originate in response not to the external stimuli of the environment, but to the internal impulses of the will. Thus we hardly feel that a man is "alive," if he does nothing more than merely react, after the fashion of an animal, to the various impressions or accidents which he encounters in the outer world. In addition to this, he must himself initiate action and thus show himself to be a free agent. Successful suppression, diversion, or utilization of instinctive reactions to the influences of the environment—voluntary movements of the body or its limbs, directed to the fulfilment of conscious aims—the conception of a plan of action involving forethought and hazard—the ordered expression of thought and emotion through the media of art, literature, and music—these are a few of the things in which we find evidences of what we call

life. The fact that these things comprise the essence of the life of which we are so keenly aware within ourselves, makes us assume that their appearance in other persons is evidence of their possession of a life identical with our own.

Thus it is at one moment! Then, at the next moment, everything is changed! The body is still, the ears deaf, the lips sealed! The hands no longer grasp their tools, the feet stop short upon their errands, the eyes look out upon no far horizons! If there were prophecies, they fail; if there were tongues, they cease; if there was knowledge, it vanishes away! Not even is there any response to external impressions. This body, so strangely inert, may be cast into the flames, but it does not struggle. These eyes may be pierced with light, but they do not move. These lips may be smitten and seared, but they do not cry out! Not a trace of this vitality, which we feel throbbing within our own beings, can now be found within the frame of this wife, or child, or friend. All that we mean by life is ended. And therefore do we begin to speak of—death!

Now it is extraordinary, you say, that, in the face of this destruction or disappearance of every evidence of life, man should ever have conceived the idea that this life is somewhere and somehow still surviving. True enough! Is it not so extraordinary, indeed, as to be manifestly absurd? It is understandable that primitive man should look upon the cold, still, unresponsive

face of his mate and believe that that mate was still alive. This is no more remarkable than that this same primitive man should believe that he could injure his enemy by sticking pins into the wax or clay image of his body—or that, when he was ill, he was the victim of demons who could only be driven away by hideous noises, vile smells, and priestly incantations—or that, when he died, he could take his horse, and hunting dogs, and weapons with him into the next world, by the simple process of having them buried with his body. Early man was the victim of innumerable superstitions, of which the idea of the survival of the soul, after the death of the body, is only one. But surely modern man in this far-advanced age of reason and enlightenment, is not going to be the dupe of any such wonder-tale as this! We take our ideas, today, upon evidence. We decline to believe anything that is not supported by the facts of observation and experiment. We will gladly go as far as verified experience will take us; but we cannot go beyond, and, what is more important still, we cannot go in the opposite direction! Therefore are we forced to throw away all hopes of a life beyond the grave. This is an idea which not only has no evidence in its support, but stands in flagrant contradiction of every sign which life has given us of its reality. Right here before our face and eyes we see life come, and we see life go. We mark at once its beginning and its end. The beginning, in the individual as well as in the cosmic

sense, may be hazy, for in the one case as in the other, the process eludes our observation. But the end is as plain as the noonday sun. Every detail of the death process has been observed; and here at the close, as an unanswerable exhibit, is the dissolving body. Here, so tangible that we can touch it, dissect it, measure it, is death! How absurd, in the face of this positive evidence of the cessation of vitality, to continue to believe in its survival! Why not be honest with ourselves and with the world, and confess that if any evidence is to be trusted for any conclusion, death is what it appears to be—the end?

II

Such is one way of looking at this problem, undoubtedly!

But that this is not the only way, nor even the usual way, needs no demonstration at this point in our argument. So far from regarding the idea of immortality as extraordinary, most men have gone to the other extreme of thinking it extraordinary that such an idea as that of *death* should ever have found lodgment within the human mind! So extraordinary is this fact, indeed, that, in the judgment not only of the ignorant masses but also of the majority of the ablest thinkers and bravest prophets of all ages, it may be said to constitute its own best refutation.

Persons who have approached the question from

this point of view have not been oblivious to the facts of physical dissolution, to which we have referred. Full often have they sat by the bed of death, and followed the lifeless body to the tomb. But these commonplace facts have appeared to them to be insignificant as compared with certain other facts which should not, and indeed cannot, be ignored.

First of all, they have been simply overwhelmed by the evidence which has been borne in upon their senses by every wind that blows, every flower that blooms, every star that wheels upon its silent pathway through the skies, that the universe, in its every minutest particle as well as in its every remotest corner, is throbbing with ceaseless life. Death is the transient, life the eternal, thing; death the appearance, life the reality! In the early days of man's experience, this conviction found expression in Animism, which explained the omnipresence of life in nature by the hypothesis that a personality, or divine being of some kind, was resident within each particular object, and thus the initiator of its activity. In the early days of exact thinking, this primitive anthropomorphism was superseded by such philosophic conceptions as that of Heracleitus, who, unlike Thales and Anaximander, saw no one substance at the heart of things, but only unceasing *change* from one substance to another. In our own time, we have such carefully formulated scientific conceptions as the law of the persistence of force, the

doctrine of motion as the source of matter, and the all-inclusive principle of evolution. But the idea at the heart of these theories, both ancient and modern, has in all cases been the same—that everything is alive; that nothing comes to an end, or is extinguished; that even this phenomenon which we call death is only the beginning of new phases of the one unescapable reality. Every new fact discovered, every new experience undergone, from the dawn of the world to the present moment, has but served to give added emphasis to this conviction. Originally a matter of feeling, it is today become a matter of knowledge. Once a theme for the more or less fanciful speculations of religion and poetry, it is now become the accepted basis of the cold, hard propositions of science. Opinion in our day is fast becoming unanimous. However they may differ in outlook, point of view, and ultimate conclusion, poet and prophet, philosopher and theologian, scientist and seer, are at least agreed in this—that the universe is alive, and that in life, therefore, and not in death, is to be found the secret of its origin and destiny.

Along with our growing understanding of nature as a living organism, has gone the more wonderful discovery of ourselves—our place in the universe and the powers at our command for the conquest of the universe. In the beginning, man seemed to be the least of all earth's creatures. He trembled at the lightning which clove the solid

darkness of the midnight like a flaming sword; he stood in awe before the tumbling grandeur of the sea; he bowed his head before the tempest; he escaped to hill and upland from the river-floods.

He fled the cave-bear over the rocks full of iron ore and the promise of sword and spear; he froze to death upon a ledge of coal; he drank water muddy with clay that would one day make cups of porcelain; he chewed the ear of wild wheat he had plucked; he gazed with dim speculation in his eyes at the birds that soared beyond his reach.¹

Then suddenly, at some forgotten and yet epochal moment in the development of humanity, there came the time when man found the secret of power. A sharp stick, driven into the soil, turned the furrow for the planting of the seed. A heavy stone or a loose branch, snatched hurriedly in flight and hurled in desperation against some pursuing monster, was the weapon which made the jungle a hunting-ground for his prowess. A hollow log, afloat upon the waters, tempted him to use the pathways of the sea. Huts and hovels followed naturally upon rude bowers in the trees and dark caves within the mountain-sides as shelters from the storm. The skins of slaughtered beasts were made his covering against the cold. The horse and ox were tamed to be his servants. The flowing stream became his burden-bearer, and all the winds blew fair upon the lifted sails of

¹ See H. G. Wells's *The World Set Free*, page 12.

ship and mill. Even fire was caught and made to do his bidding. Then man became more social. Male no longer raged in brutish madness against male. Family joined with family in the joint labours of field and pasture and the chase. Harvests laughed beneath the autumn suns. Herds of cattle grazed upon a thousand hills. Villages sprang up in sheltered vales. Then with co-operation in the task of living, came leisure; and with leisure, the rude beginnings of thought. Man played with the wet clay of the drinking-pools, and moulded it into cups and bowls, which he found to his surprise held water. He scratched idly upon the smooth faces of the cliff, and was astonished to see pictures of the things he knew about him. He sucked the reed which he [had snatched from the river-bush and was amazed to hear sweet noises, like the notes of birds. He gazed with aimless brooding upon the kindly sky, the infinite sea, the rushing mountain-stream, and found himself wondering who made them. He blinked in speechless terror at the lightning, the sweeping storm, the heaving earthquake, and asked what men were these that could thus split trees asunder, level his buildings to the ground, and shake the earth as he himself might shake a brandished club. And ere he knew it, he was rearing altars upon the high-places, and offering sacrifices to those unseen beings who alone defied his waxing power of hand and brain. And more and more as he thought upon these wondrous

things, did he find himself dreaming dreams of greater conquests than any that he had seen—seeing visions of loftier heights of knowledge and achievement than any that he had climbed! Curiosity, expectation, ambition, the joy of attainment, the challenge of the untried, the lure of the unknown, and always to some degree or other the sheer drive of necessity—all these played their part as motives in the great drama of human expansion. And thus through scores and hundreds of centuries of lust, greed, struggle, and mutual aid, did man grow in strength and understanding, until today he stands upon the dizzy heights of what we call his twentieth century civilization with its crowded cities, its vast developments of natural resources, its stupendous industrial enterprises, its myriad paths of commerce upon land and sea, its miracles of steam and electricity, its gigantic armaments of war, its dazzling wealth and sordid poverty, its dreams of peace and social justice, and its mighty passion for the fulfilment of these dreams! What a tale is here—from the beginning to the end a tale of man's discovery of himself!

And out of it has come—what? Cities, empires, civilizations, religions—these obviously enough! But in and through and over all these outward things, the growing realization upon the part of man of the astounding fact that he is a centre of life and power—that he is an independent being, conscious, assertive, purposeful—and that

as such he is something entirely apart from such outward material entities as the universe upon the one hand and his body upon the other. These live, just as he lives, to be sure. Life is as truly without as within him. But he is more and greater than these—he is separate from them, above them, the master of them. What is the universe, after all, but a vast treasure-house, in which he finds the articles that he needs for his comfort and the forces that he needs for his undertakings? What is his body, but the inmost chamber of his house, the closest garment of his spirit, the nearest and handiest tool for his work? It is impossible to consider himself as in any way confined to the essentially narrow limits of these realities. Long since man has learned to cast away his body, with indifference or even joy, on the battlefield, in the torture-chamber, at the stake or on the gibbet, when his soul had made it clear that such a sacrifice was the best use to which, at the moment, the body could be put. Is it impossible even to imagine him, at some distant time when all things are literally “under his feet,” deciding to smash this planet into bits, if thereby it might be fashioned more nearly to the heart’s desire. And in this case exactly as in the other, the soul which conceives and does these mighty works, must still abide. As well think of the painter failing when his brush is thrown away, or the poet dying when his pen is gone, as to think of man perishing when his body is broken or worn out.

As well think of the householder disappearing when his home is dismantled, or the chemist dead when his laboratory is destroyed, as to think of man blotted out when this earth has been returned to the roving fire-mist from which it came! Man is a life apart! He has a body, a home, a country, a planet—but he *is* a soul! Therefore shall he live on, as truly as the living cosmos, which was, and is, and shall be evermore!

Such are the facts of life which have always pressed upon the minds of the majority of men, and made them look upon the so-called facts of death as of no significance. What is a dead body in the face of the living universe and the living soul? The idea of immortality, you say, extraordinary! Nay, it is the idea of death which is extraordinary! So extraordinary indeed is this idea, that never have men been able at any time in one common body of assent, to believe it. In the distant past as today, and today as in the distant past, they have laid the inert body tenderly away, in gratitude for the revelation it has borne of the spirit's presence, and hoped ever against hope, believed in spite of unbelief, that the spirit was somewhere and somehow living on. Here is the end of the evidence of life, but surely not the evidence of the end of life! Life has no end! It is by its very nature eternal! Death is only an illusion of the senses—at the very most an absence of that which has been present and is now elsewhere. Therefore is the dead body a paltry

thing, which in the face of stars and seasons and species, of knowledge and aspiration and will, argues for us nothing—absolutely nothing! A change has come, no doubt! But never yet, in anything that man has seen or known of this great universe of life without and within himself, has a change meant an end. On the contrary, it has always and everywhere meant a fresh beginning. And if this is universally true of things which are seen and known, why should it not be true of things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived?

III

Right here, now, in a dead body upon the one hand, and a living soul in a living universe upon the other, do we have the whole of the issue that is involved in the problem of immortality. If we believe in the body, then its cessation of all response to external stimuli and of all initiation of activity, must convince us that the end has come. If, however, we believe in the soul, and in the on-sweeping surge of the great universe in which it dwells, then the aeons of life herein revealed must outweigh the dissolution of the flesh, and teach us that indeed

There is no death. What seems so is transition! The alternative is plain. One choice or the other must be made; and according as we choose, so must we believe.

But is there not something more involved in this alternative than has yet been indicated? Is our choice really confined to what a dead body can tell us about life and its end, and what life itself can tell us about this same phenomenon? On the contrary, are we not here brought face to face with two fundamental and mutually exclusive viewpoints of the universe and all that it contains of mystery and wonder? Is not our problem of mortality *vs.* immortality an epitome of the whole great problem of existence? Are we not here confronted, after all, not so much with the question, What shall we believe comes after death, as with the question, What shall we accept as our basic philosophy of life?

IV

In moving thus from the lower ground of a particular problem to the higher ground of a fundamental generalization, we again find ourselves face to face with a single alternative. On the one hand, there is what may be called the materialistic view of life. From this point of view, the universe is nothing more nor less than the combination, in terms of evolution, of matter and energy. In the beginning of things, if it is possible to imagine such a beginning for the sake of argument, there existed a single atom of matter plus a single spark of energy. These two original entities were at some wonderful moment and in some

wonderful way brought together into a single unit of life, and everything that has appeared in the universe from that far-away time to the present moment, has been simply the result of the unceasing mechanical interplay of these two basic realities. Matter and energy! these explain all that has been, all that is, and all that ever shall be, from the lowest unicellular organism that was evolved from the primeval slime to the noblest man and purest woman who ever played their heroic parts in the sublime drama of humanity. Matter?—a fortuitous concourse of whirling atoms! Energy?—a blind, unreckoning, unfeeling force! The universe?—a perfectly adjusted and thus perfectly working mechanism! Man?—the highest of the mammalian vertebrates! Thought?—a secretion of the brain, as bile is a secretion of the liver! God?—an anthropomorphic personification of the physical world-process!¹ The soul?—a convenient phrase to cover the passing sensation of self-consciousness! Religion?—a superstition which has survived with a peculiar degree of persistency from the early childhood of the race! Thus does the materialistic philosophy reduce life to its lowest terms, and interpret phenomena in the light of these terms.

Side by side with this materialistic point of view, there runs, as there has always run, another point of view, which we may call for lack of a better

¹Or, as Ernst Haeckel has expressed it, in his *Riddle of the Universe*, a kind of "gaseous vertebrate"!

word, the spiritual. Adherents of this philosophy recognize, with the adherents of materialism, the ultimate analysis of the constituent substance of the world into matter and force. But they refuse to believe, with these same materialists, that these words mean anything particularly illuminating in themselves. What is matter, they insist upon asking? What is force? And in answering these questions they insist also upon looking at the problem from the point of view not of *genesis*, if we may so express it, but of *revelation*. Nobody could tell the meaning of the flower by confining attention to the ugly bulb which is planted in the earth! The historian would go far astray in his interpretation of humanity, if he never travelled in his studies beyond the ape-man of the African jungles! The prophecy of Shakespeare could never be detected from however careful a study of the embryo in the mother's womb! If we would know the meaning of the tree of life, we must study not its roots but its fruits. "By their fruits, ye shall know them"—a fact as true in the realm of botany and biology as in the realm of morals!

Thus it is that the spiritualist, if we may call him such, breaks at the very start with the materialist! He goes to the end of life's journey, rather than to the beginning, for the explanation of this matter and force about which the materialist talks so much. And here he finds phenomena in abundance which seem to take him into the realms of which the materialist, apparently, has never even

dreamed. The "dirt philosophy" of life may serve very well, perhaps, so long as we are dealing merely with dirt. Materialism may answer as an explanation of star dust, and seaweed, and earth-worms, and barnacles. But what about the pyramids of Egypt, the Parthenon of Athens, the cathedrals of Milan and Cologne? What about the *Iliad*, the *Æneid*, *Faust*? What about the *Venus de Medici* and the *Sistine Madonna*? What about the *Fifth Symphony* and *Tristan und Isolde*? What about the prophets of Israel, the philosophers of Greece, the Stoics of Rome, the martyrs and saints of Christianity, the patriots of France and Germany, the Pilgrims, Cromwell's Ironsides, the Abolitionists, the Garibaldian Red-Shirts? What about Leonidas, Regulus, Judas Maccabæus, William Wallace, Arnold von Winkelried, Hampton and Pym, Nathan Hale, Samuel Adams and Patrick Henry, Washington, Lincoln, Mazzini, Gladstone, Savonarola, Luther, John Wesley, Theodore Parker, Socrates, Jesus! What about the millions of unnamed men and women, who in all ages and all places, have "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions, waxed valiant in fight . . . were starved, sawn asunder, slain with the sword . . . destitute, afflicted, tormented!" Does materialism explain such phenomena as these? Does matter plumb these depths of suffering, or force scale these heights of devotion? Here is life at its best and its truest! These are the "fruits" by which we are told that

we shall "know!" And once we are thus brought face to face with these immortal triumphs of humanity, we find indeed that we know this one thing at least—that nothing can adequately explain these realities but that one holy spirit of creative life, of which the greatest prophets have told us from the beginning. Life is at bottom spiritual, or it is nothing. In all and through all and over all is God, the Father, the Creator, the Over-Soul, the Beginning and the End—call him what you will! His divine spirit is at once the source from which life flows, and the sea toward which it moves. It is the power which appears in the physical universe as force or energy—it is the power which "wells up in man in the form of consciousness," to quote the familiar words of Herbert Spencer—it is the power, unknown and unknowable, and yet so clearly known, which builds the temples, teaches the prophecies, chants the songs, conceives the heroisms, dreams the dreams and sees the visions, which have glorified, and still glorify, the heart of man. God is a reality—the only reality! The soul is true—the only truth! Life is spirit—all spirit and only spirit!

V

Such are the two points of view from which men have looked at and interpreted the world—the material and the spiritual! And it is obvious, is it not, to which of these two fundamental

philosophies belongs the conception of mortality, and to which the conception of immortality? Here at last are we face to face with the larger and deeper implications of the problem which we have been discussing through all the many pages of this book. To believe that death is the end, is to accept, whether we will or no, the whole sum and substance of materialism. To accept the spiritual interpretation of life is at the same time to accept the immortal hope. These things belong together, as the part belongs to the whole and the whole to the part. The final and perfect justification of the idea of immortality is its immediate kinship with that great family of ideas which constitutes the universe of the spirit. It fits in with the thought of God; it matches the conception of the soul; it harmonizes with the ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty; it answers to the noblest dreams and aspirations of the human spirit. Therefore and therewith is it true!

APPENDIX

I

The more important books referred to in the text are listed, herewith, for the benefit of those who may like to follow more carefully the course of thought pursued in this volume.

- BARRETT, W. F. *Psychical Research.*
BERGSON, HENRI. *Creative Evolution.*
BIXBY, JAMES T. *The New World and the New Thought.*
BROWN, WILLIAM ADAMS. *The Christian Hope.*
DANTE. *The Divine Comedy.*
DARWIN, CHARLES. *Origin of Species.*
— *The Descent of Man.*
DICKINSON, G. LOWES. *Is Immortality Desirable?*
DOLE, CHARLES F. *The Hope of Immortality.*
DRUMMOND, HENRY. *The Ascent of Man.*
DUNCAN, R. K. *The New Knowledge.*
ELIOT, CHARLES W. *The Religion of the Future.*
EMERSON, RALPH WALDO. *Essay on Immortality.*
FISKE, JOHN. *The Destiny of Man.*
— *Life Everlasting.*
— *Through Nature to God.*
GORDON, GEORGE A. *Immortality and the New Theodicy.*
GURNEY, EDMUND (etc.) *Phantasms of the Living.*
HAECKEL, ERNST. *The Riddle of the Universe.*
— *The Wonders of Life.*
HOMER. *Odyssey.*
HUXLEY, THOMAS. *Evolution and Ethics.*
— *Man's Place in Nature.*
— *Darwiniana.*
HYSLOP, JAMES. *Science and a Future Life.*

- JAMES, WILLIAM. *Two Supposed Objections to Human Immortality.*
 — *What Psychological Research has Accomplished, in The Will to Believe.*
- JORDAN & KELLOGG. *Evolution and Animal Life.*
- LANG, ANDREW. *Presidential Address before the Society for Psychological Research.*
- LE CONTE, JOSEPH. *Evolution and Its Relation to Religious Thought.*
- LODGE, SIR OLIVER. *Continuity.*
 — *Life and Matter.*
- LOTZE, RUDOLPH HERMANN. *Metaphysics.*
- MAETERLINCK, MAURICE. *Our Eternity.*
- MARTINEAU, JAMES. *A Study of Religion.*
- METCHNIKOFF, ÉLIE. *The Prolongation of Life.*
 — *The Nature of Man.*
- MILL, JOHN STUART. *Theism, Part III.*
- MILTON, JOHN. *Paradise Lost.*
- MÜNSTERBERG, HUGO. *The Eternal Life.*
- MYERS, FREDERICK. *Human Personality and its Survival after Bodily Death.*
- OSLER, WILLIAM. *Science and Immortality.*
- OSTWALD, WILHELM. *Individuality and Immortality.*
- PARKER, THEODORE. *A Sermon on the Immortal Life.*
- PLATO. *Apology.*
 — *Crito.*
 — *Phædo.*
 — *Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research.*
- ROYCE, JOSIAH. *The Conception of Immortality.*
 — *The World and the Individual.*
- SAVAGE, MINOT J. *Life Beyond Death.*
- SCHOPENHAUER, ARTHUR. *The World As Will.*
- SPENCER, HERBERT. *First Principles.*
 — *Principles of Biology.*
- SUNDERLAND, J. T. *The Spark in the Clod.*
- SWENDENBORG, EMANUEL. *Heaven and Hell.*
- THOMSON, W. H. *Brain and Personality.*
- WALLACE, ALFRED RUSSEL. *Darwinism.*
 — *Social Environment and Moral Progress.*
- WELLS, H. G. *First and Last Things.*

II

To these may be added the following books as important discussions of the general problem of immortality.

ABBOTT, LYMAN. *Evolution and Immortality*, in *The Theology of an Evolutionist*.

— *The Other Room*.

ALGER, WILLIAM R. *Critical History of the Doctrine of the Future Life*.

BARRETT, W. F. *On the Threshold of a New World of Thought*.

BJÖRKLUND, GUSTAF. *Death and Resurrection*.

CALTHROP, SAMUEL R. *Immortality, in God and His World*.

CROTHERS, SAMUEL M. *The Endless Life*.

DAHLE, LARS NIELSEN. *Life After Death*.

DOAN, FRANK C. *Life Everlasting*, in *Religion and the Modern Mind*.

FARRAR, JAMES. *The Eternal Hope*.

— *Mercy and Judgment*.

FECHNER, GUSTAV THEODOR. *Life After Death*.

FOSDICK, HARRY. *The Assurance of Immortality*.

GORDON, GEORGE A. *The Witness to Immortality*.

HAYNES, E. S. P. *The Belief in Personal Immortality*.

HOWISON, GEORGE HOLMES. *Human Immortality*, in *The Limits of Evolution*.

HUNTINGTON, W. R. *A Conditional Immortality*.

JAINES, WILLIAM. *Final Impressions of a Psychical Researcher, in Memories and Studies*.

JEFFERSON, CHARLES E. *Why We may Believe in Life after Death*.

LODGE, SIR OLIVER. *Science and Immortality*.

— *The Survival of Man*.

MCCONNELL, SAMUEL D. *The Evolution of Immortality*.

MOORE, GEORGE F. *Metempsychosis*.

MYERS, FREDERICK. *Science and a Future Life*.

PALMER, GEORGE H. *Intimations of Immortality in the Sonnets of William Shakespeare*.

PARKER, THEODORE. *A Discourse of Religion*, Book I, Chapter vi.

— *The Function and Influence of the Idea of Immortal Life, in Theism, Atheism, and the Popular Theology*.

- PODMORE, F. *Modern Spiritualism.*
— *Apparitions and Thought Transference.*
- ROW, CHARLES AUGUSTUS, *Future Retribution.*
- SALMOND, S. D. F. *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality.*
- SAVAGE, MINOT J. *Can Telepathy Explain?*
— *The Passing and Permanent in Religion* (Chapters xi-xiii.).
- SHALER, NATHANIEL S. *The Individual.*
- SMYTH, NEWMAN. *Modern Belief in Immortality.*
— *The Place of Death in Evolution.*
- WELLDON, JAMES E. C. *The Hope of Immortality.*

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